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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STAFF COLLABORATION:
DYNAMICS AND INFLUENCES

by

THERESA STEFANIUK

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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DR. LINDA LAROCQUE, SUPERVISOR

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DATE: Sept. 24, 1991.

ABSTRACT

Research of the past decade clearly indicates that change initiatives which embrace the improvement of teaching practice by considering the dynamics of the school culture are more successful than those where change is imposed upon the school membership. These dynamics are often related to norms of behavior which make a school's culture visible. One such norm is that of collaboration.

The purpose of this interpretive study is to develop an understanding of how staff collaboration contributes to the way teachers perceive their teaching role and the way they see their relationships with other members of the school. Categories and themes emerging from the observations of various interactions and activities at one school, identified as Maple School for the purpose of this study, along with extensive interviewing of its leader and five teachers provided useful insights into its collaborative practices and their value.

What was revealed was that the norm of collaboration inherently contributed to many facets of the school's organization and operation as well as to moving the school forward. Within this collaborative environment numerous opportunities brought teachers together where they created shared goals, participated in decision making, shared their problems and were given collegial support and assistance. What appeared as most valuable about these interactions was the creation of a shared working knowledge that focused on

improving instructional practice and learning about techniques that will best meet student needs.

What also became evident was the importance of the principal's role in moving the school toward becoming more collaborative. The principal of Maple School has defined her vision, set the tone for the culture of the school, is knowledgeable about effective teaching practices and participates in efforts to improve instruction.

Learning about how this school has incorporated the theme of collaboration within its structure and what effect a collaborative culture has on its students brings new meaning to how schools are organized and how its membership functions.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

As a classroom teacher and administrator I have worked in different schools with different school staffs. What became apparent from these varied experiences were the subtle distinctions that set one staff apart from the other. In some situations staff cohesiveness was very evident but the channels "to get things done" quite informal. In others, the staff could be characterized as divisive but with a formal network of channels to get teachers working together. I questioned why it was that these staffs were so different.

The inclination to discover a possible answer quite naturally led me to the growing body of research on collaboration which has found that schools where teachers share understandings about the importance of their school's effect and work together to improve instructional practices are more successful in teaching the young (Barth, 1990; Coleman & LaRocque, 1990; Lightfoot, 1983; Little, 1982; Maeroff, 1988; Rosenholtz, 1989).

Each of these studies was significant in that I could identify my perceptions and beliefs about my own practices in their findings. Each also contributed by giving direction to my study and suggesting fruitful ideas to

explore.

In Barth, who clearly advocated the need for improving the relationship between teacher and principal and building a "community of learners" (Chapter 4) where members "honor learning, participation and cooperation above prescription, production and competition" (p. 43), I realized that I, too, needed to understand the relationships among the staff I would be studying. Maeroff's description of empowerment of teachers in terms of their participation in the decisions that affect them emphasized staff relationships and the professionalization of teachers.

Studies of school culture by Little, Lightfoot and Rosenholtz referred more specifically to the pattern of staff relationships identified in the successful school and the norms and values it supported. Little highlighted the critical role of the norms of collegiality and experimentation; Lightfoot, the recognition of each school's "imperfections" and "goodness"; and Rosenholtz, the social organization of the school. I was curious to discover the nature of collegial interactions and their relationship to improving teaching practice amongst the teachers in my study.

Also of significance to me was learning about the linkage between these norms and the value of shared working knowledge that Coleman and LaRocque found to be an immediate outcome of collaboration in their study.

Whatever the findings, I believed the need to study schools where innovation was not feared was of consequence and had to be pursued. Only by learning about the values and norms that build productive cultures can the educational community begin to positively influence nonproductive cultures.

Background to the Study

During my course work with Dr. Linda LaRocque I learned about the Partnership Schools Practicum Project (PSSP). This project had a number of characteristics that distinguished it from other practicum projects: (a) seven to ten student teachers were assigned to each school; (b) students were assigned to the school rather than the teacher; (c) the school administrators were actively involved in socializing the student teacher to the norms and values of the school, offering experiences beyond the classroom walls; (d) cooperating teachers met regularly to discuss issues and concerns; and (e) members of the faculty worked with the school during the practicum period offering professional development sessions.

There were several features of this project that interested me, one being the nature of the objectives that guided it. These included developing teachers who are "reflective as well as proficient" and providing opportunities where student teachers can experience norms of

collegiality and experimentation, thereby breaking down the norm of isolation. These objectives were directly related to my own area of interest. The second feature that captured my interest was that the schools selected as the sites for this project were considered to be exemplary schools and thus would be ideal for my own study.

Another appealing element was the fact that a team of researchers would be involved in studying this project. The concept of "team" offered a sense of security in what was for me the uncharted world of research. I was also excited by the prospect of participating in the peer review of these colleagues, learning firsthand about their research and selfishly thinking that the knowledge and understanding that I would be gaining from each of their experiences would be helpful to me in my capacity as administrator and classroom teacher.

A final attraction to this project was the fact that what I had proposed to research would be of direct relevance to others involved in the project. My study would provide a meaningful context for the PSSP and provide a better understanding of the environment in which the student teachers were placed.

Statement of the Problem

The central research question for this study was: What norms of behavior, with respect to collaboration, are

inherent in the school culture and how do they shape the way teachers understand their teaching roles? I gathered information with the intention of developing an understanding of teacher collaboration. A number of more specific questions served to guide the development of this study and the analysis of the data. These questions were:

1. What are the issues that bring teachers together?
2. What kinds of opportunities bring teachers together?
3. What do teachers value about these interactions?
4. What does the principal do to facilitate collaboration?
5. How are these interactions related to improved practice?
6. How are norms of interaction related to teacher certainty and teacher commitment?

This study was emergent in its design and therefore the interviews were not limited to these questions.

Significance of the Problem

A new era of school improvement and change is emerging. At the heart of this is the realization that the "invisible" culture of the organization is what guides the beliefs and practices for its members and that when implementing an innovation the impact of the culture cannot be disregarded.

What is needed, then, are studies that can provide practitioners and theoreticians with a better understanding of school cultures. We need to know what norms and values

guide the decision making process, what it is that creates good environments and how staff best adapt to these environments.

More specifically, what is needed is a better understanding of the role of the norm of collaboration and the consequences for teachers who become collaborative, sharing in the creation of a culture that is visible.

What is also of significance is that this study explores what is salient from the teachers' perspective, something that Lortie (1975) recognized was lacking in the research of that decade and what Feimen-Nemser and Floden (1986) still believe requires attention. This is supported in their statement: "The practical wisdom of competent teachers remains a largely untapped source of insights for the improvement of teaching" (p. 505).

It was intended that the findings of my research would address these specific issues and would be of interest to those who are involved with the process of school improvement and change. It is hoped that this study will refine their understanding of the variety of ways people can productively work together and the impact shared working knowledge has on these individuals. It was also expected that this study would give new insight into teachers' views of the dynamics of these interactions and help the participants, as well as other teachers and administrators in similar circumstances, understand what it is people get

from these relationships and what it takes to sustain them.

Assumptions

For the purpose of this study it was assumed that:

1. The replies given by teachers were indicative of their attitudes, beliefs and knowledge and that their responses were the best source to describe staff interactions.
2. Norms of interaction in successful schools are related to teacher commitment and teacher certainty.
3. The principal can create coherence between the organization's purpose and its culture.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are inherent in the methods used to gather data. Reliance on observation and interview as the primary source of data collection may have presented drawbacks involving my research inexperience and possible biases introduced by my own perspectives. The quality of data gathered depended to a great extent on my ability to interpret what I observed, my rapport with the participants and my ability to probe effectively to uncover all possible situations relevant to the study.

Data were collected within a limited time frame, which was essentially the practicum period of February to April.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to a small sample of respondents in one of the PSPP schools whom the principal believed would best meet my criteria. Every attempt was also made to observe as many staff development meetings, planning meetings and informal staff interactions as possible during the data collection period.

Organization of the Thesis

This report of a study of staff collaboration and its consequences is organized into five chapters. Chapter one explains what motivated me to choose this specific area of study, the assumptions, limitations and delimitations to this research and concludes with a description of how this thesis is organized.

Chapter two contains the review of the current literature and forms the context for the study. It includes a brief examination of school effectiveness theories, studies on school culture and specific staff norms, teacher professionalism and empowerment and the role of the principal in creating specific cultures.

The methodology used to conduct the study is described in the third chapter. It includes the design of the study, the data sources and the data collection procedures. This study was conducted within the naturalistic paradigm and used qualitative methods for data collection. A section on

data trustworthiness concludes this chapter.

Chapter four reports the findings of all interviews and observations and is presented in five categories. Underlying these categories were three themes which are recorded in the final part of the chapter.

Chapter five concludes this study. Personal reflections, how findings relate to recent literature and implications for further study are shared.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Within any school a variety of characteristics influence to a greater or lesser degree the effectiveness and professional satisfaction of those who work there. The need to understand these characteristics becomes more pressing for both the researcher and the practitioner as societal demands for improved education escalate.

A popular response to these demands in the late seventies and early eighties was the creation of school improvement programs. Assessment of the impact of these initiatives pointed out that most were unsuccessful because school reform was not effectively implemented by higher level administration (Purkey & Smith, 1982; Ralph & Fennesy, 1983). The more successful approaches looked beyond the goals of the organization to the dynamics of the school culture and its effect on the quality of teaching and thus on the success of the school.

It is with this second approach that this literature review will concentrate. It is first necessary, however, to consider briefly the effective school studies of the last decade.

School Effectiveness Initiatives

Much of the school effectiveness research is based on

the study of schools that have been identified as effective beyond expectation and confirms the fact that schools do make a difference (a fact disputed in the Coleman and Associates study of 1966). This success is usually determined by some measure of achievement gain (i.e., standardized test scores) and less often by developing an understanding of the organizational culture.

One such study given considerable attention in the literature is Gilbert Austin's 1979 study of 18 high-achieving and 12 low-achieving schools in Maryland. The major differences that were found between these two sets of schools concerned the role of the principal as instructional leader; the high level of expectation for students, teachers and the principal alike; and the orientation toward academic goals.

A second study, also identified as "outlier" because of its selection of schools statistically identified as unusually effective and ineffective, is the Brookover and Schneider study conducted in 1975 in Michigan elementary schools. In this particular study six variables that they believed were significantly related to gains in achievement were identified.

Studies such as these have been numerous, all quite similar in their procedures of school selection and methodology for research. What varies is the reported

characteristics for effectiveness that each study has uncovered. But as Purkey and Smith (1982) have pointed out, they typically involve some combination of (a) strong administrative leadership, (b) a safe and orderly school climate, (c) an emphasis on basic academic skills, (d) high teacher expectations for all students, and (e) a system for monitoring and assessing pupil performance (p. 63).

The value of these findings has not been lost by the educational research community or the educational practitioner. What is of concern, however, is the wholesale adoption of the characteristics associated with the effective school by would-be reformers. In Austin's conclusions he clearly cautions application of his findings and "suggests that there is no single easily identified variable which by some magical manipulation on the part of school boards, superintendents, or other administrators will turn a school around" (p. 131).

Purkey and Smith (1982) express similar reservations. They recognize the value of discovering the characteristics of effective schools and accept that these are "seeds for school improvement that can be sown elsewhere," but qualify this with the warning that "blanket acceptance would be dangerous" and that "instituting" these changes are not often successful (p. 64).

An examination of the organizational theory that characterizes schools and the assessment instruments that

are used in evaluating effectiveness will provide further insights into this lack of success.

Organizational Theory

School effectiveness programs often have been imposed by school districts. This approach to implementation of change is based on the assumption that schools are bureaucratically organized in a hierarchical system that is tightly structured with a strong central control (Owens, 1987, p. 23), often referred to as the neoclassical approach to organization. Cohen, March and Olsen (1972) disagree that schools are tightly structured systems. They describe them as "organized anarchies" where goals are not specific and clear (p. 1). Karl Weick (1976) has coined this structure as "loose coupling," which describes the school as an organization comprised of subsystems that maintain their own identities and personality (p. 27).

However, neither the tightly structured nor the loose coupling seem to describe the successful school that exhibits a shared set of values and a high degree of interdependence. Sergiovanni's (1990) vision of the "successful" school is one that is both tightly structured and loosely coupled. In this framework "a strong culture and a clear sense of purpose" can be realized, still allowing individuals the autonomy to "pursue these themes in

ways that make sense to them" (p. 111). Here the leader models important goals and behaviors, providing the school and its membership with a clear sense of purpose and a meaningfulness about the work.

A possible misinterpretation of how schools are structured is not the only criticism of the school effectiveness movement; the criteria used in selecting the effective school have also been subjected to scrutiny.

Assessment Instruments

Purkey & Smith (1982), Sergiovanni (1990) and Stedman (1987) believe that the use of achievement scores as the sole criteria for judging school effectiveness is too narrow and that achieving effectiveness in other dimensions is equally important. Measuring the success of these other dimensions, however, is not as straightforward and scientific and therefore has been abandoned by the effectiveness researcher (Sergiovanni, 1990; Stedman, 1987).

Sergiovanni (1990) again provides us with a description of that alternate dimension. He prefers to label these schools as successful, differentiating them from the effective school and the academic gains which form its evaluative criteria. Identifying the components of the successful school is not without its intricacies because of the difficulty in identifying all those things that are "intuitively good." Sergiovanni describes them thusly:

> In successful schools things "hang together"; a sense of purpose exists, rallying people to a common cause; work has meaning, and life is significant; teachers and students work together and with spirit; and accomplishments are readily recognized. (p. 77)

In offering this set of criteria he implicitly states that this list is not all inclusive nor is it to be used as a checklist:

> To say that successful schools have high morale or achieve higher test scores or send more students to college -- and to leave it at that -- is to miss the point. Success is all these and more. (p. 77)

Accompanying this definition is a whole new body of research that provides a fuller and more comprehensive understanding of the nature of school success.

A Look at School Culture

More recent studies and analyses of these studies (Cohen, 1987; Norman, 1989; Pugh, 1989; Sackney & Wilson, 1987) present a more complex and comprehensive picture of school improvement. For example, it has been found that successful initiatives must focus on both "improving teaching practices and school management, the technical core of the school, as well as school culture, the social side of the school, simultaneously, because they are inextricably intertwined" (Cohen, 1987, p. 478-9).

Sackney and Wilson (1987) suggest that we view schools "as dynamic social systems with cultural characteristics" (p. 17). These cultural characteristics are described by

Owens (1987) as "a system of shared values and beliefs that interact with an organization's people, organizational structures, and control systems to produce behavioral norms" (p. 165). Deal and Kennedy (1983) describe culture "pragmatically" as "the way we do things around here" and incorporate the elements of "shared values and beliefs, heros and heroines, rituals and ceremonies, and an informal network of priests and priestesses, storytellers, spies and gossips" (p. 14). Greenfield (1986) sees culture as having a social and a moral aspect.

Within this framework a differentiation between school cultures that are productive and those that are not can be formulated. At a recent local conference Grimmett (1991) sketched the "typical" unproductive school culture as one that breeds the "norm of self-sufficiency and individualism." In 1975 Lortie referred to teaching as a profession which is typically being performed in isolation from one's colleagues. Feimen-Nemser and Floden (1986) refer to the "norm of noninterference" (p. 506) as one in which shared problem solving rarely occurs and "teachers are expected to work things out" (p. 506).

Teachers in this typical unproductive culture have been led to believe that they have to prove that they can "cut the mustard" and "hack it" (Grimmett, 1991). They also believe that they should not intrude into another teacher's classroom because that is interfering in that individual's

"professional autonomy." They are looking for "things which are going to help [them] on Monday mornings . . . to improve [their] bag of tricks." Anything that is thought of as theoretical or abstract in nature is irrelevant. Grimmett can understand the thinking behind this but sees these beliefs and values as limiting those innovations that lead to school improvement.

The productive culture, on the other hand, is identified by a strong sense of community with commonly shared goals, high expectations for staff and students, tightly structured beliefs and values with a loosely coupled organizational structure and mechanisms for sustaining motivation and commitment (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Grimmett, 1991; Little, 1981; Rutter et al., 1979). Deal and Kennedy's analysis suggests that the primary mission of the school is in communicating its identity which is reflected in its desired values. There is also opportunity for teachers in this culture to build up a language that is shared (Little, 1981). Rutter et al. (1979) identifies the productive culture as having norms and values that unite its members into a "cohesive community" in terms of the practical, the social and academic progress. His work also demonstrates that school "ethos," another term for school culture, not only increases achievement but also improves student behavior and attendance and reduces incidence of delinquency when channelled in positive directions.

More specific aspects of this ethos need to be examined, such as the norms of behavior that make a school's culture visible. One such norm may be that of collaboration and its contribution to shaping the way teachers perceive their teaching role and the way they see their relationships with other members of the school.

Norms of Interaction

Collaboration has been defined by Hord (1986) as "a term that implies the parties involved share responsibility and authority for basic policy decision making" (p. 22). Rosenholtz (1989) views collaboration very differently and makes reference to the intricacies of the collaborative process:

> shared goals, beliefs, and values led teachers through their talk to a more ennobling vision that placed teaching issues and children's interests in the forefront, and that bound them, including newcomers, to pursue that same vision. (p. 39)

Not only is there disagreement in the literature about what constitutes collaboration, delineation between the terms collegiality and collaboration is not clearly evident. Coleman and LaRocque (1990) define collegiality as:

> Shared values between all staff members, including the principal, which allow teachers to operate autonomously in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and also to help one another continuously to improve practice. (p. 20)

Little (1982) is more specific in her definition and describes four classes of interactions that are "crucial":

> Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice.
>
> Teachers are frequently observed and provided with useful critiques of their teaching.
>
> Teachers plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together.
>
> Teachers teach each other the practice of teaching. (p. 331)

For the purpose of this thesis the term collaboration will most often be used.

The Value of Collaboration in Improving The Practice of Teaching

Research into school improvement identifies the relationships among staffs as crucial to the success of the change initiatives. In the successful school teachers frequently work and interact with one another and value this collaboration. They are involved in staff development programs together, offer and receive assistance from one another, share ideas and experiences about teaching and are more willing to experiment with new approaches (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1982; Barth, 1990; Goodlad, 1984; Lieberman, 1986a, 1986b; Lightfoot, 1983; Little, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989; Rutter et al., 1979).

Barth's (1990) understanding of how schools can become more collaborative is based on his own experiences and impressions. He recognizes the difficulty that exists in introducing collaboration into the "persistent" culture of

schools but believes that it is an imperative condition for school improvement. He states:

> The relationships among adults are the basis, the precondition, the sine qua non that allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement. Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change. (p. 32)

A possible solution is in recreating the school as a "community of learners" where "students discover, and adults rediscover, the joys, the difficulties, and the satisfactions of learning" (p. 43). Teachers in this setting engage in "continuous inquiry about teaching." They are "colleagues helping one another provide a powerful source of recognition and respect both for the helpers and for those who are helped" (p. 46).

Coleman and LaRocque (1990) have coined a phrase to describe the results of these collaborative relationships. They describe it as "developing shared understandings of possible links between student achievement, professional norms and classroom activities" (p. 38). What results is a shared language and a shared way of doing things where teachers are encouraged and energized "to learn together and from one another" (p. 48).

Little's (1982) one year ethnographic study of six American schools highlights two norms that contribute to successful schools. One norm is collegiality; the examples of crucial interactions presented earlier illustrate that the work of teachers is shared work, not to be performed in

the isolation of the classroom. In the successful school there are many such interactions, involving a large portion of the staff and involving many different aspects of teaching.

The second norm, closely related to the first, is that of experimentation and reflects the process of continuous analysis and evaluation of teaching practices. Little believes that when both these norms are present, teachers are involved in improving their instructional practices and consequently improving the operation of the school. Ashton, Webb and Doda's (1982) research report similar findings, highlighting that a reduction of ambiguity and self-doubt about the work of teaching and "enhanced teacher efficacy [is] frequently reflected in more positive classroom teaching" (p. 22).

Another well documented study that looks at how schools are socially organized is Rosenholtz's (1989) study of 78 elementary schools in eight Tennessee districts. She examines teachers' understandings, their expectations and knowledge of school life and the behavior that results. Two assumptions were tested. The first is that teachers make sense of their school world by assigning meanings to situations and react in terms of their interpretations of those meanings. The second is that the uncertainties that are associated with teaching prevent teachers from participating in the pursuit of shared school goals (p. 3).

This study identifies and examines five school realities, three of which are particularly relevant to this thesis: teacher collaboration, teacher certainty and teacher commitment. Rosenholtz also identifies the social organization of schools as paramount in affecting workplace conditions.

Teacher collaboration, she found, is closely connected to teachers' certainty about the "technical culture and instructional practices." In systems where there is collegial support, participatory decision-making, and shared goals, teachers share their problems and show "mutual concern for their collective teaching performance" (p. 50). Teacher uncertainty is also minimized in settings where there is positive feedback and assistance is given to improve instructional practices.

The final reality, that of teacher commitment, examined what it was that induced teachers to contribute productively to the school. The study found that commitment was present if teachers felt that their efforts caused positive changes, their rewards outweighed their frustrations relative to students, and learning opportunities existed.

Three other studies by Goodlad (1984), Lightfoot (1983) and Rutter et al. (1979) will be mentioned briefly, not because they contribute less to the understanding of how teachers improve their practice but because of the limitation of space within this thesis. Each employed a

slightly different methodological approach to the research but share some commonalities in their findings about the value of collaboration. Lightfoot, in her description of "goodness" that is "imperfect and changing" (p. 24), reveals that "what is often perceived as solitary leadership in schools is fueled by partnerships and alliances with intimate, trusted associates" (p. 25). It is these partnerships that move schools forward in their search for improvement.

Rutter et al., in the identification of the "ethos" of the school, emphasizes that the differences among schools "does not lie in factors such as buildings or resources" (p. 20) but is concerned more with "school processes" (Chapter 7), referring to those aspects of school life "which create the context for teaching and learning and which seem likely to affect the nature of the school experience" (p. 106). These school processes include an emphasis on academics, teacher actions, student responsibilities and staff organization (p. 107). Furthermore, it was their "combined" or "cumulative" effect that impacted the school more than any one variable measured independently (p. 179).

In Goodlad's report of his study he states:

> It appears that mutual trust between principals and teachers, considerable autonomy in the classroom for teachers, support for teachers by principals, and respect for each other as professionals are important elements in the healthy school workplace. (p. 52)

What he is suggesting here is that both the teacher and

principal stand to gain in such a relationship. As colleagues they work toward common goals, the principal with a sense of his or her own professionalism and the teacher with the support to help one another improve the practice of teaching.

This professional autonomy is yet another value of a collaborative culture. Grimmett (1991) defines professional autonomy as the "freedom to make educational choices from a right plethora of alternatives according to the perspective of the learner." What he is essentially saying is that in a collaborative culture beliefs and values hold teachers accountable but do not limit their capacity to operate autonomously.

Little's (1987) research concurs. She found that teachers who are involved in collaborative efforts feel that they have "heightened control over work that resides in the group" (p. 497) and also feel more influential, offering another form of professional autonomy.

In addition to the shared working knowledge, the improvement of teaching practice and the professional autonomy that results from collaboration, Lieberman (1986a) highlights its role in school improvement and change. She states: "In many cases we find that change efforts have been successful due to some type of collaborative relations between participating parties" (p. 5) and confirms this by describing collaborative projects undertaken in American

schools that have effected change. Lieberman (1986b) makes reference to this in the following statement:

> Schools cannot improve without people working together. The more people work together the more we have the possibility of better understanding these complex problems and acting on them in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. (p. 6)

Yet before collaboration becomes the norm, there are a number of barriers that need to be addressed.

Removing Barriers

The practice of teaching is still confounded with the problem of isolation and as Barth (1990) so pessimistically but realistically states, collegiality is "easier said than done" (p. 32). This is one of the barriers, however, that must be removed if we expect to see wholesale improvement in the practice of teaching. Many (Barth, 1988; Cooper, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1988; Devaney & Sykes, 1988; Maeroff, 1988; McLaughlin & Yee, 1988) have found the building of collaboration to be essential to the creation of more professional cultures in schools. Teachers need to be recognized as professionals and in turn this professionalism will bring teachers together to foster that sense of community and sharing (Cooper, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1988; Devaney & Sykes, 1988).

"Empowerment" of the teaching profession is also seen as a way to remove barriers of isolation (Maeroff, 1988). Giving teachers greater power to make decisions, he

believes, is a major way to make them more professional and improve their performance. Empowerment he defines as "working in an environment in which a teacher acts as a professional and is treated as a professional" (p. 6), and having "the power to exercise one's craft with confidence and to help shape the way the job is to be done" (p. 4). This environment includes increasing the amount of recognition given to teachers, making teachers more knowledgeable and ending the sense of isolation.

Barth (1988) reports some of the difficulties that have arisen when there have been efforts to engage teachers and principals in school-wide decision making. Teacher associations, unsure of the motives, respond with caution; principals, too, are defensive, fearful that teachers might "lead" schools. Removal of these barriers, Barth (1988) concludes, creates a situation where "everyone can win" (p. 132). The teacher wins by "enjoying the responsibility for success" (p. 140) and the principal in "recognizing that there is plenty of leadership to go around" (p. 132). This "winning strategy" can be fostered by a principal's particular leadership style.

Principal Facilitation of Collaboration and the Improvement Of the Practice of Teaching

There is consensus among the researchers of collaboration (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1982; Barth, 1990;

Grimmett, 1991; Goodlad, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983; Little, 1981, 1982; Rosenholtz, 1989; Rutter et al., 1979) about the important role principals play in moving schools toward becoming collaborative. Certain aspects of this leadership are coming increasingly into focus as research in this area and that of instructional leadership progresses. I will describe the three which are cited most often in the literature as important determinants to the improvement of relationships among practitioners and ultimately, the practice of teaching.

Leadership Focuses on School Culture

The leader plays a key role in creating a culture that is accepted and cohesive (Deal & Kennedy, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1984). These strong functional cultures "emerge deliberately -- they are nurtured and built by the school leadership and membership" (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 10). Deal and Kennedy (1983) highlight the importance of building a functional school culture because of its intimate ties to improved instructional performance. They are of the opinion that the functional culture binds teachers, students, administrators and parents to common goals. Therefore educational leaders must get to know their cultures and examine how this culture might be encouraging or undermining educational performance (p. 15).

Leadership Requires a Vision

Manasse (1986) emphasizes the role of vision in giving "life to an organization," (p. 150) and describes vision as the "force which molds meaning for the people of an organization" (p. 150). In leading schools to improvement principals are most responsible for defining this vision and setting the tone for the culture of the school (Barth, 1990; Duke, 1990; Dwyer, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1984, 1990). They must establish clear goals and articulate a vision toward which all staffs can direct their energy (Duke, 1990; DeBevoise, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1984).

Barth (1990), Blumberg and Greenfield (1990), Hill (1990), Little (1981) and Sergiovanni (1984) stress that effective leaders use this vision to guide their many daily interactions, modelling norms that reflect their beliefs. They are not content to maintain the status quo. The vision of principals seeking to improve the instructional practices of their schools takes the form of setting high expectations that motivates staff toward innovation (Larson, 1987).

Leadership Models and Shapes Suitable Norms

Sergiovanni (1984) identifies the leader of the school as the "chief" who models important goals and behaviors as a signal to others of what is important and of value. When the staff of a school witness the vision of a school portrayed in the actions of their leader, their own behavior

is affected providing the impetus needed for innovation (Hill, 1990).

Little (1981; 1982) found that principals contribute to the development of collegiality and continuous improvement in several ways. First, they state expectations that staff are to be knowledgeable about effective practices and to participate in efforts to improve instruction. Second, they model collegiality by participating in instructional improvement activities themselves. Third, they reward collegiality and teachers who are trying to improve by granting release time, recognition, space, materials or funds. Finally, they protect teachers who engage in collegiality and who are implementing new practices from the demands on their time and energy.

Barth (1990) also believes that the principal can be a "catalyst assisting teacher growth" (p. 50) and that the professional growth of teachers is closely related to the relationships that are formed within the school. Rosenholtz (1985) validates this opinion in her statement, "These norms do not simply happen or spring spontaneously out of worker's mutual respect for one another, but rather are a product of direct principal intervention" (p. 367).

Summary

As this literature review has illustrated, the last two decades has witnessed a substantial transition in the manner

sought to improving the practice of teaching and in the methods used to research the process. That we are only at the threshold of this transition is illustrated in Lieberman's (1986a) statement: "We are just beginning to understand that the process of change in schools is dominated by how ideas are introduced, organized, supported, and implemented" (p. 5).

Initially, school improvement efforts assumed a bureaucratic stance and research of the process was conducted within the positivistic paradigm. Critiques of both the process and the evaluative instrument opened new avenues of exploration, of which the culture of the school and an interpretivistic mode of investigation are the nucleus.

Barth (1990), Coleman and LaRocque (1990), Grimmett (1991), Lieberman (1986a, 1986b), Little (1981, 1982, 1987) and Rosenholtz (1989) have helped to make sense of the literature available. Each recognizes the value of the collaborative approach to school improvement and offers confidence to the practitioner whose practice it is these changes are affecting.

Within this new structure is a stronger sense of community with commonly shared goals and professionally autonomous teachers practising their craft. The role of the principal also takes on new meaning. The context of "manager" no longer suffices and instead a more integrated

leader who is sensitive to articulating a vision that will bind the organization to shared beliefs and values emerges.

The focus of this study was on the culture of one school and the collaborative interactions that were embedded into the whole being of this school. The methodology used to make these discoveries will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was one of a set of interrelated sub-studies, identified as the Partnership Schools Practicum Project (PSPP). Each investigated some specific feature of three schools' environments. My particular study sought to gain some understanding of the dynamics and the effects of collaboration among the staff of one of these schools. This chapter discusses the specifics of the methodology used in this study.

Research Design

My desire to observe firsthand how school cultures are organized influenced me to select data collection procedures of observation and interview within the interpretive or naturalistic paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1982) describe why this paradigm is most suitable for a study such as this:

> It offers a contextual relevance and richness unmatched by any other paradigm. It is driven by theory grounded in the data; the naturalist does not search for data to fit his or her theory but develops a theory to explain the data. (p.235)

This method of inquiry allowed me to search for understandings and insight into what was observed and what participants had revealed. In deference to the fact that each phenomenon is unique and "can only be studied holistically" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 383), generalizations

were not made nor was there any attempt to prove theories. Instead, working hypotheses about the ways different people make sense of their school experiences were developed.

Participants

The first step of obtaining district approval for the anticipated research was completed by the coordinator of the PSPP, Dr. Linda LaRocque. As a member of the PSPP team, I then visited the selected school site and described my research to the school principal and explained the criteria I wanted to use for selecting participants. She suggested speaking to two specific grade level groups whose involvement in school collaborative activities varied. Several weeks later I was introduced to these groups and explained the purpose of my study to them. I asked for three volunteers who would be willing to be interviewed extensively. Three volunteered at the meeting. All three had been at this school for more than five years and actively participated in cooperative team planning.

I was concerned that the narrowness of this sample would limit applicability in other contexts. In the initial interviewing this concern was confirmed. I realized that even though I was gaining an understanding of the interactions that occur at this school I needed the perspectives of teachers whose experiences differed. I then decided to interview another member of the seven to whom I

originally explained my research because she was a new member to the school and new to the idea of team planning. She accepted without hesitation. I then spoke to the principal, asking her if she could suggest another member whose experiences at team planning were not as successful. She offered several names; the first I approached also willingly agreed to be interviewed.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that the confidences shared about specific individuals and situations would remain confidential. Assignment of the pseudonyms of Joan, Laura, Susan, Terri and Janet for the teachers interviewed and Rose for the principal further ensured this confidentiality.

Data Collection

The primary methods of data collection were audiotaped interviews and observations. Observations included the weekly staff development meetings, grade planning meetings, cooperating teachers' workshops, one meeting of Grade three and four cooperating teachers from the three participating PSPP Schools, and several informal observations of staff room and hallway interactions. Each of these contributed to my general understanding of how this school does things.

Participants initially selected were interviewed twice; these interviews were audiotaped. The participants selected later also were interviewed twice, but only the first was

audiotaped. Interviews were arranged with each of the volunteers in advance and took place at a location convenient for the participants. One such interview was conducted in the participant's car as we drove from one location to another completing errands. All others took place at the school, either in the individual's classrooms or in one of the small offices set aside for small meetings. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes, one taking a full hour to complete.

Each interview began with some casual conversation, a review of the procedures and repeated assurance of confidentiality. I then asked open-ended questions that allowed each participant the latitude to shape the content of the interviews. My probing (guiding questions were prepared beforehand to assist with this probing) from this initial question furnished insights into what was significant to teachers about their interactions with fellow teachers and the administrator.

I had hoped that by structuring the interview in this manner I would not be imposing my views on the participants. There were occasions during the interviews where I felt that questions I asked did not meaningfully convey what it was I meant, resulting in the rewording or reconstructing of questions to clarify this meaning.

Data Analysis

Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that data analysis and coding occur throughout the study. This information can then be used to provide direction for future observation and interviewing. It is this process that I have made an effort to follow.

Field notes were written during my observations of scheduled meetings. These field notes most often included the exact quotations of the participants. They were then retyped at home and more detailed description of the events were included along with my own "observer comments" and reflections. The less formal observations of staff in the staffroom and hallways were recorded later, rather than during the interaction, to relieve some of the discomfort that may have been experienced by those that may not have known what it was I was doing.

Analysis of the transcripts that were prepared from the audiotaped interviews began with reading each transcript and listening to the interview tape to confirm that all information typed by the transcriber was accurate. After my second reading I began the coding of the first transcripts. This I did by identifying meanings of specific ideas and interpretations and writing these words in the margins. Descriptive words were often taken directly from the participants' own language and used as codes. I then copied all of these codes on a piece of fullscap paper and tried to

organize them into common groups. After repeating this reading/coding process several times, my first set of categories was identified. While analyzing the remaining transcripts I continually refined my categories.

A similar procedure of reading, rereading and coding was used for my field notes. Field notes and interview categories were then compared, matched and discrepancies noted. I completed this process without consideration of my research questions, only to discover that there was a close correlation to these original questions. Descriptors within some of the categories were then grouped into subcategories.

Another phase of the analysis involved searching for the pervasive themes that could be used to describe these data. It was not until I shared my analysis with the PSPP research team that I uncovered the first theme. Rereading of the data and thinking about it as a whole as well as in terms of its meaningfulness allowed the second and third themes to emerge.

Data Trustworthiness

Guba and Lincoln (1982) identify four issues in the naturalistic paradigm concerning trustworthiness of the research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (p. 246-7).

I used a number of strategies to increase the credibility of this research. Typed transcripts and a

report of the findings were returned to the participants in order that they might add, delete, elaborate or verify information given. These were then discussed in follow-up interviews and necessary changes made in the findings chapter ensuring credibility of these data.

Peer reviews also served as a credibility check. Members of the research team, which included my advisor, met with me regularly to discuss findings and identify new directions for inquiry. These discussions revealed themes and categories to be consistent with the data collected.

Throughout this study an audit trail was maintained to ensure dependability. Interview tapes, a master transcript of each interview showing categories and themes, as well as journal notes and a log noting reflections was kept to make me aware of my biases and help me to avoid introducing bias into the study.

In order to establish transferability, selection of participants was undertaken to account for teachers with varying years of experience and background. Thick descriptions of the context was also provided enabling judgements to be made.

Confirmability of the research findings was established by using triangulation techniques to collect data. Interviewing along with extensive observation provided corroboration of the findings, regular visits with the participants both in formal observations and the more

informal "staffroom" interaction helped to give me a sense of the context of their experiences and to ensure that what was discussed in the interview was accurate and reliable.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used in this study. The reasons for choosing a naturalistic approach was explained first. A description of participant selection procedures, the ethical guidelines used to ensure their confidentiality, the data collection methods and the analysis procedures used were then summarized. Finally, the issue of establishing trustworthiness was discussed. The following chapter presents the findings of the data collected.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: THE VALUES, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES AT MAPLE SCHOOL

Introduction

This chapter contains the research findings about the norm of collaboration and the way it shapes how teachers understand their teaching role at Maple School. During interviewing, observations and conversations, school members revealed their experiences with collaboration, their beliefs about their teaching practices and what it was that influenced these beliefs.

Emerging from these data is a description of the context of this school -- assigned the pseudonym Maple -- and a detailed account of its collaborative practices. These have been interpreted under the five major categories: (a) opportunities that bring teachers together, (b) what teachers share during collaboration, (c) what teachers value about collaboration, (d) how teachers learn to work collaboratively, and (e) the role the principal plays in facilitating this process.

The themes that subsequently emerged from these data will conclude this chapter.

The participants are represented in these data through their "voice," my interpretations of our discussions and what I observed. Use of participant voice gives the reader

what Casey and Apple (1989) describe as the "personal understandings" of these participants, placing them at the "center of the research agenda" (p. 181). Within this structure a more enriched description of the beliefs and practices at Maple School emerged.

The first section, the context of the school, begins with my impressions after touring the school for the first time. The second records the personal understandings of the participants and the norms of behavior that reflect those beliefs.

The Context of Maple School

As soon as one enters Maple one is immediately greeted by thought-provoking messages giving the impression that the environment for learning is significant and valued here. Adorning the entrance and hallway walls are welcome signs printed in several different languages; captions reminding us of our responsibilities as fellow humans, declaring "We Are One With All the Colors of the World" or "Together We Are Strong" or "I Believe in You"; and a multitude of other art displays completed by the various classes from Kindergarten to Grade Nine.

Butterflies and rainbows are the symbols that have been adopted by Maple and they are also visually displayed. The butterfly represents the change that is taking place; the rainbow reflects the promise, hope and beauty in all.

This strong visual impact and these visible symbols are but the prelude of what contributes to the climate of pride and ownership. Only after extensive interviewing of the participants, observations and ongoing conversation with school members does one begin to understand that this visual impact is truly symbolic of what this school believes and practices.

Working in Maple School

"I love this school."

"My first time into this school was just 'Wow! Wow!'"

"When I came to this school I just got recharged."

These thoughts were shared by two of the staff members with whom I spoke during one of my many visits to Maple School and are revealing of the norms that characterize Maple. They also serve to introduce these norms, grouped according to characteristics specific to this working environment, as interpreted by the five teachers interviewed.

Beliefs and Values are Examined

"We have a belief system, a strong belief system and a strong philosophy which comes from the admin team and down. Their philosophy and the way that they feel about things, and the energy that they put in, and the enthusiasm, it rubs off on all the people underneath them."

"I think the admin team does not make the philosophy. It is done at the PD in the fall where we all get together and through fluency activities we come up with the belief systems that are put together by the staff that it stands behind for that particular year."

Professionalism is Nurtured

"At the very first staff meeting she [the principal] has a little game for introducing the new people. She said at that time any of the new people on staff that have taught at other places where they have experienced success in anything or have ideas that worked very well, please share them, we're always open, we always welcome new ideas. Any teacher who has any special talent or interest, they're welcome to explore that with their class."

"Here all the PDs are very uplifting, too. They make you really happy to be here and make you think about why you're here and what your job entails."

"The people on staff feel like professionals because they are treated that way. There is the confidence in the realization that you're expected to be a professional, I think, because our Thursdays are PD days and are true PD days. They are not meetings where we go in and discuss whose behavior is what, etc., etc. I think because of that we are also kept up with all of the new and what shall I say credible kinds of innovations that are out there and we are

given the opportunity in every circumstance to test them out."

Commitment to Improved Practice

"They [the administrative team] are extremely encouraging in every possible manner. You want to try something different, you are given every opportunity. If there is any kind of workshop, any kind of seminar, any kind of conference, the stuff is on the table for anybody to take advantage of. They will try as much as they can to give us the opportunity to get funding if that's possible. You know you're just encouraged in every aspect, and each one is like that, they are very encouraging, supportive, and very open and accessible. Therefore the place runs like it does."

"We do not have somebody coming in and saying 'show me your plans', 'show me what you are doing.' We certainly are assessed at the regular intervals, but more informal methods perhaps and certainly a less threatening method. I think the team know how things are being handled. They're very aware by the kinds of things the children are doing which are displayed, the kinds of things which we share amongst each other all of the time."

Linking Beliefs to Practices

"The whole school is child-centered. The children are to be treated with dignity. The environment is to be a

risk-taking environment. It's to be very stimulating, and these are not, they're just the things that we believe in. It's not something where somebody says 'you have to do this,' it's the things that come from all of us in a shared activity which bring out all of these things."

"This truly is a rainbow school. Rose (the principal), and I guess me too believes that in everybody, in every drop of water, there is a rainbow if you look for it. So in every child, even though it might not be obvious at the beginning, if we look we're going to find their rainbow. It's there and it's up to us to find it. As professionals that's our job and so if I find that there is some child that I find difficulty relating to or with, or working with, it's because of me, not because of that child. It's up to me to work in as many different ways as I can to find their rainbow and bring it out so that everybody can see it."

* * * * *

To better understand how these behaviors become reality, the data will be further explored within the five categories presented.

Presentation of the Categories

The encouragement to develop professionally in a risk-free environment sets the tone for what happens at this school and is the common thread that is woven into the description of all the categories that follow.

Opportunities that Bring Teachers Together

Interactions that occur at this school occur frequently, among different members and in many different situations. Joan expresses it this way: "Fortunately in our school sharing is so much a part of our everyday experience that I don't think anybody in the school ever thinks about not sharing an idea."

This "sharing" occurs in grade level teams, across the grade levels and with the administrators. They focus on planning celebrations, designing and interpreting curriculum, discussing teaching practices and students or purely for the purpose of socializing among the staff; all of which contribute to teachers' confidence and satisfaction.

A more thorough description of the opportunities that I found present at Maple will be further described. These include staff development meetings, grade level teams, team-ups, cross grading, celebrations, teachers sharing their expertise and sharing outside the school.

Staff Development Meetings

Every Thursday students are dismissed early, providing the staff with about one hour to meet (lengthening the school day on remaining days makes this possible). During these staff development sessions beliefs and values are examined and linked to school practices, school creeds are

written or specific curricular concerns are addressed.

Janet sees these meetings as "visionary," where "continued growth is encouraged and challenges are presented, making it impossible for anyone to become stale." She also talks about how she often walks away from these meetings "feeling like I'm not doing enough." She is not implying here that she is discouraged or frustrated; on the contrary, she states: "It makes you see how much is out there. Just when you think you've got it, you find out how much more you can do."

Others see these meetings as a time for self-esteem building and as stated by Laura, "They are very uplifting. They make you really happy to be here and make you think about why you're here and what your job entails."

Specific subcategories that provide a general description of the themes that guide staff development meetings will now be examined in more detail.

Beliefs and values articulated. Rose begins each new school year by sharing with the staff what it is she truly believes (these particular beliefs will be discussed more specifically in the concluding category) but realizes that what is essential is that these "I believe" statements must be made into "we believe" without "just laying it on." Rose describes what she does to try and achieve this:

> Looking back at my educational career, I'm sure the first couple of years I probably was laying it on. I think we do that in our classrooms, I think we do that in our organizations. But you find out

> very quickly that it doesn't work that way, and you could be the only one believing it, and that means nobody else is buying in.

What can leaders do to assure that teachers do "buy in" to a shared set of beliefs and values? Rose believes as the staff developer she must first have a clear sense of what it is she believes. She is then in the position to provide the appropriate opportunities where teachers are faced with examining their beliefs and questioning how these beliefs match their practices. She explains what she has done to initiate this process:

> I think they (leaders) have to start with the "I" and they seriously have to look at what it is "I Believe In" and get it written down so that it's concrete. Then you can really examine if you believe it, are you living it, and then move it to the "We" because once it becomes a "We" then it really becomes empowering in the organization and the people know where they're going.
>
> So what we did, we moved from that "I" to that "We" and we had every person in our school write an "I statement", and then join it together in small groups. We had eight or nine of these and then we tried to pull them together into a statement for the school. What is it we're really after in this organization? I think that is so powerful because I think a lot of times we don't stop and think about it, and don't put it into writing.

This year the staff met outside the school setting at a retreat in the beginning of the school year to begin this process and then continued it during the year.

That these statements are a personification of the school's beliefs and not those of Rose only is illustrated in previous data relaying participant reflections of the

context of the school.

Linking beliefs and practices. Examining one's beliefs is but the first part of the process. Unless these beliefs and values are actually linked to what is practiced, what the teachers do in the classroom may or may not be affected. Therefore what is essential in this process is that teachers must examine their practices and relate them to the articulated belief statements. Rose describes how the staff participated in this part of the process:

> We provided the experience where we had people reflect on a teacher who touched your life, or a child who touched your life, or an experience in your workplace that impacted on you. It's hard to get at the heart of what we believe because it's at that unconscious level, but it's there and we need to be consciously aware.
>
> So one of the things that we did in our own school this year was "Go off the top." What we did we just took our belief statements and we broke it down into pieces. We had staff work on it and put it into concrete action. It was amazing how hard that was to do. You have those statements that are there, but how do you get to really live it out in the school, because unless you live it out it isn't really happening, it's not really the norm in that school.
>
> This is the driving force that pulls everything together and I think in any organization one might have to look at what they believe, and what their values are, and where they are going, so they can really live out what it is that organization is all about.

Even though this process is initiated at the retreat several staff meetings during the year are also devoted to it, providing opportunities for staff to examine and re-examine their practices.

One such opportunity occurred at a staff development meeting that I observed and that also was attended by a visiting school. At the previous staff development meeting Maple staff had looked at the learning environment in metaphorical terms (i.e., the teacher is like water). This meeting would be a continuation, also focusing on the "whole idea of metaphor."

This time teachers, sitting in groups of seven or eight at octagon tables, were challenged to come up with their own metaphor for the term "school." Magician's hat, garden, child's laugh and sailing ship were a few chosen. Each group was assigned one of these metaphors and asked to reflect on how it could be used to describe the teacher, the student, the curriculum, the school structure and learning. Each of these was then shared with the entire group.

Joan later commented on how these sessions "really do make us look at how our practices and beliefs are matching." Janet also made reference to these meetings and the value of working on such activities with groups of teachers. "They're a real boost to your self-esteem, a re-affirmation, a re-confirming that what you are doing is good."

Curriculum development. Staff development meetings also focus on specific curricular issues. In past years developing a whole language approach was delved into a great deal. This year the question of program continuity has been a regular discussion. Specific activities such as report

cards and parent teacher interviews are also addressed. Consultants from outside the school are brought in to share their expertise on matters such as cooperative learning or the teaching of some specific subject matter. Time is also set aside to plan extra-curricular activities like Christmas Concerts or Education Week.

Creating atmosphere. Staff development time is also viewed as an opportunity when staff can come together in celebration, in a "sharing and caring" atmosphere or for "comic relief." One such celebration centered on Valentine's Day. Food and refreshments were provided for the staff. Staff members joined in the singing of love songs and the playing of musical instruments.

Another occurred after their successful Anti-racial Discrimination Day. Special guests who attended the ceremony were invited to the staffroom for cake ordered for this event. Teachers joined the guests to socialize and share in the celebration.

Building this time into the busy schedules is important because it is seen as a time when teachers remove their "teacher hats to get to know one another better." What Janet also values about these occasions is that Rose "makes a point of saying something inspirational." One that she recalls made reference to the light from a candle, "Your light will never diminish. It grows bigger and stronger as you share."

Grade Level Teams

Teachers at the same grade level are involved in cooperative planning. It originated with one group of teachers at one of the grade levels about five years ago. A new teacher to join the staff came from what she described as a traditional setting. She realized that joining Maple staff meant that she would have to adopt the whole language approach used by the other teachers. She also realized that she could not do this on her own and began to drop into the classroom of other teachers at her grade level, asking questions about their practice. These individuals were very helpful and the "drop ins" quickly developed into meetings during recess, lunch and after school.

Other teachers were also found sharing with teachers at their grade level.

Rose, the principal, recognized the value in this sharing and decided to provide those teachers with release time for planning. She accomplished this by assuming responsibility for the students during this time. This was difficult because of the large number of students she was working with and because time set aside for team planning did not always correspond to the times that Rose could be available.

Reassessment of this arrangement was needed. The following year cooperative planning time was scheduled into the timetable for all the elementary grades. Rose explains

how she managed this timetabling:

> It's the very first thing we timetable so that it can happen. A lot of times people say you can't timetable it. You can timetable it if it's first, and it is first! So the very first thing you do is make sure your people get together and then everything else gets scheduled. And that's how it's been working for three years.

All elementary grades now have a forty minute time slot each week to meet with teachers at their grade level. Having this scheduled time to meet led some teacher groups "quite naturally" into designing curriculum on the basis of themes; researching, developing and evaluating programs; and preparing teaching materials together. When these teachers are not engaged in the development of their themes they are busy planning fieldtrips, classroom celebrations, or talking about the practice of teaching which includes how best to meet the individual needs of their students.

Some teams do not meet to design curriculum but meet primarily for the purpose of planning field trips; sharing specific activities, experiences and activity sheets; or talking about ideas on how to work with certain students.

Team-ups

The team-up, also referred to as the "community," is a grouping of four to six classrooms that are located beside one another and of different grade levels. Terri describes the team-up and how the team-up works in their community:

> Another thing we do here that I think is just fantastic is we have team-ups. Where I am, we are

> the only grade fives (all grades identified are not the ones actually reported), there are two grade three's and a grade one. So my children each have a little team of three people. They're like a big sister or a big brother and that brings a lot of responsibility because those little people look up to them. They're going to try to act like them and be like them and it gives them an example.
>
> We do projects together called team-up projects. My people will do something at their level and the other people will do something at their level. For example they might read a story they have written and the little people might do the illustrations to go with it.

Susan explains how many of these "get togethers" may happen before a major celebration like Remembrance Day, Easter or Christmas. At this time students might work on a "little craft together or a bulletin board that they will put up together." What is important about this sharing time is that "as a community they're (the students) drawn together" and from this they learn the "respecting of each other and each other's rights as a learner." They also "benefit from what each teacher has to offer."

Some team-ups come together more often than others. Janet explains how this year her team did not get together to plan activities as often as they did other years and attributed this to the busyness of their group and the fact that "energy was directed into other special events" that did not include participation by teams.

The team-up was not created for the students only; teachers in the community work together and sometimes "supply breakfast on a Friday morning and bring muffins."

Susan also says, "It's more of a social thing for the staff and a modelling thing for the kids."

Cross Grading

A third teaming arrangement that is evident at Maple is the "cross grading" that occurs between two grades. Students from the Junior high are paired or "buddied" with students at the elementary level. This may happen for celebrations or for curriculum needs. Susan tells about the first celebration in September that initiates this pairing. The older student takes the younger child by the hand and together they enter the gymnasium, sharing in the celebration in this manner. Susan sees two benefits in this: (a) "it makes the little ones be not so afraid of the bigger ones" and (b) "it makes the older ones better behaved for celebrations."

This partnership continues throughout the year and extends into the curriculum. Sometimes these same paired grades meet to share religion classes or meet to share the expertise of one another. Such examples include interviewing of one another, editing of stories, shared reading and providing an audience when needed. Pairing of these classes is usually facilitated by the principal.

Pairing also occurs between individual teachers on a less organized basis. Teachers who share common goals or feel "comfortable" working together create partnerships for

many of the same reasons as the more formal groupings.

Celebrations

Ceremonies are part of the symbolic elements of the culture and this organization is well aware of the role they play in creating bonds and conveying what is valued. They are seen by some as a way to "humanize the environment" and "build community." Therefore deciding what this school celebrates is very important, be it a simple ritual or an elaborate tradition.

Joan describes how celebrations are usually organized at Maple:

> Rose is very instrumental in getting the activity initiated and she will brainstorm with either the staff or a group who said that they will very gladly coordinate whatever the activity is. Within the group there is a lot of brainstorming going on as to what kinds of art activities will be up on the wall or what kinds of other activities are appropriate for the occasion.

Multiculturalism is something that is "celebrated" at this school daily and to symbolize its importance they have ritualized it by setting aside a special day in its honor, called their Anti-Racial Discrimination Day.

Organization of the activity began at one of their Thursday Staff Development meetings when Rose presented the idea to the staff and told them that it was something that "they (the administrative team) would really like to participate in on the 21st of March." "Presenting the idea" involved more than the sharing of the concept. Rose set the

tone for this session by reading the story "I Wish I Were a Butterfly" by James Howe. This story is about a cricket who goes about wishing he were a butterfly until one day he comes to realize that he, like the butterfly, is beautiful.

Staff members were then asked to reflect about the one student who, like that cricket, has not yet found its beauty. Tiny mirror pins were also given to the staff to wear, symbolizing the reflection that professionals must engage in if they are to move forward to improve their practice.

Each of the grade levels were then asked to decide the activities that they would like to do to "enhance that day." Joan recounts the events.

> So within our group we brainstormed and we came up with the kinds of activities we wanted to do. Then we shared amongst the entire staff so that we weren't all doing the same thing, or the things that we were doing weren't really relevant.

I had the opportunity to participate in part of the day's celebrations and observe how "it all comes together." In the morning students were busy in their rooms making friendship lapel pins, masks (symbolic of the analogy "look behind the mask"), banners, viewing a film about racial discrimination, or dramatizing or writing about their own feelings of frustration and aloneness. Each child in the school cut out a paper chain link, drawing or writing about his or her feelings and beliefs on this link.

The afternoon celebration began with representative

students from each grade entering the gymnasium in the form of a long chain with these links in hand, eventually encircling the entire gym and the students who sat within. The symbolic significance of this ritual was not lost by those who stood beside me. Many students participated in the celebration that followed. Some read their poems, or their paragraphs, or dramatized their impressions, or played a musical piece in the bell choir.

One staff member confides that she doesn't really know how it "all fits together" but is confident when she says "amazingly it all comes together." Another adds "It comes together absolutely, superbly well."

Joan believes that the reason planned activities go as well as they do is because of the thought and preparation that the administrative team devotes to deciding what activities the school should participate in and how these activities should be presented to the staff. She also describes the staff as "very cooperative . . . we just help out in whatever fashion. Where you see that something is needed, somebody fills in" and this, too, contributes to the success of such events.

The teachers are very appreciative of the time the administrative team devotes to organizing these activities and believe that the reason they do this is because they recognize how busy the teachers are within their classrooms. However, some teachers expressed that they wished there was

more opportunity for them to become involved in the decision of what events the school will participate in as well as in the initial planning stages.

> I know it's less stress for us, because we don't have to worry about it, but at the same time I guess I haven't felt ownership of some of the celebrations; I've felt more of an audience, which was wonderful, because I enjoyed it and I know I am learning. All of our celebrations have been so special, and I was in complete awe, like, "Wow!" I wanted to give them a standing ovation, but at the same time I was an audience at those celebrations.

Spontaneous Celebrations

Celebrations are not always planned in advance. Many occasions are recognized more informally and casually. Rose refers to these celebrations as "spontaneous organization and chaos," but even these are recognized as equally important in conveying what is valued here.

One such "unplanned" celebration focused on the fortieth birthday of one of the staff. Recognition of this "fateful day" began when he entered the school that morning greeted by the staff wearing black and one member playing taps. Reminders continued throughout the day. "[These] kinds of things," Joan says, "make the staff feel comfortable about things happening in a very positive manner."

Teachers Share Expertise Across the Grades

Teacher expertise is shared in the traditional sense

where programs offered by the catalyst teacher, the resource room teacher, and the teacher librarian are integrated into the regular classroom. What is different at this school is how the expertise of others is also shared.

An illustration of this is how one of the junior high drama teachers recognized that his expertise in drama could be shared with others in the school. Scheduled time was then provided which allowed him to pursue this avenue. Each week this teacher works with one teacher in the elementary grades and together they plan a lesson that integrates drama into some aspect of the curriculum that is currently being presented.

A vivid example of such an event occurred in the kindergarten room just before the incubated chick eggs were ready to hatch. Through his dramatization he was able to convey to the children the meaning of this event in a entirely new perspective. Not only has the activity had an impact on the students, their teacher, too, has expanded her repertoire of new and innovative ways to approach curriculum.

Another example of such an exchange is between the physical education specialists and other teachers who teach their own gym programs. Janet tells how she has taken advantage of this expertise:

> When they did social dance, my students sat in and watched it, and they even tried a few steps. Or I had the junior high students teach my elementary students something, so it was a fantastic

relationship.

Curriculum across the grade levels can also be shared. Laura gives an example of an art project that a teacher at another grade level admired. This particular project had a video tape that accompanied it, and not only did Laura share the project, she ordered the video "to make it a little easier for them to do."

In another example Terri explains how the calendar in the staffroom promotes teacher sharing. Each teacher usually writes in the theme they are doing and when it is being done. Other teachers look at this calendar and might say, "Hey, someone is doing 'Bunnies', and when I'm looking for information and I find anything on bunnies then I will go and give it to those people."

Sharing Outside the School

Opportunities that bring teachers together are not limited to those in this school only. Participation in the Partnership Schools Practicum Project (PSPP) provided the opportunity for cooperating teachers from these three schools to meet, recognizing that their "gifts and talents" could be shared with teachers in other schools.

Teachers in Levels One/Two, Three/Four and Five/Six from the three PSPP schools met to "share curriculum and their practices with student teachers." Fellow teachers were very interested in the practices of those at other

schools and discussions focused on the sharing of strategies adopted by individuals who have designed innovative curriculum.

Because they were all supervising a student teacher, discussion also centered on their role as cooperating teacher. They were interested in what this means and they realized that teaching teachers how to teach was not the same as teaching children. This created several dilemmas and what arose from the discussion was an understanding of the need to develop a shared language that would make their talk about what it means to be a cooperating teacher more meaningful.

Leadership opportunities like these were not limited to the PSPP. Terri talked about the sharing she does with teachers whom she has met outside the school. Materials prepared in theme planning are given to another school. This school reciprocates by sharing the resources and ideas that they may have on these specific themes. Both groups benefit in this reciprocity. Terri says, "It's so nice to know that it's going to be shared. A lot of other children are going to benefit from this work."

Teachers at Maple are also encouraged to share their expertise at workshops and inservices that are offered both within and outside the district. At the last inservice given in this district three teachers from Maple presented sessions to colleagues.

Another opportunity for sharing outside the school is provided by the principal when she delivers workshops and inservices to the many visitors to the school. These visitors usually tour the school and are encouraged to talk to the teachers in their classrooms about their practice. Rose sees this as "one of the best self-esteem builders for any teacher." One of the teachers shared these thoughts about the visitors, "We spend a lot of class time talking to them. I like to answer any of the questions they have or welcome them, invite them to walk around."

Visiting teachers have also been invited to spend a day working with the teachers in the classroom. Rose sees this as a "wonderful experience that encourages them, sharing their ideas with new people."

Teachers agreed that they appreciated the recognition they were given by the visitors and that it did do a great deal to improve their confidence but also believed that because there were so many visitors to the school more time was required to "keep things attractive" particularly because the school is known for humanizing the learning environment.

What Do Teachers Share During Collaboration

Teachers will engage in collaborative interactions that they have learned create a shared working knowledge that will ultimately improve their teaching practice. This shared working knowledge focuses primarily on creating

curriculum that enhances student learning and adopting techniques that will deliver this curriculum most effectively and efficiently. There is also the concern for the well-being of the children and how best to meet their individual needs.

This section addresses these major concerns in two components. It begins by describing collaborative interactions that teachers participate in to improve their instruction and concludes with a discussion about how teachers use collaborative interactions to learn how to deal with specific student concerns.

Sharing for Improving Their Practice

Teachers who meet regularly for grade level cooperative planning value these interactions because they believe that the challenges that each faces are similar and by combining their talents and expertise the shared working knowledge that results will allow them to grow and develop as professionals. They see cooperative planning as an opportunity to learn more and "get a lot more ideas from each other rather than just one person working in isolation."

Working with teachers across the grades is believed to be equally valuable. "It gives us a chance to share more, talk more and plan together and get the different age groups together."

Meeting with "experts" in the school, like the drama teachers or the teacher librarian or the physical education teachers, is also found useful and one in which teachers recognize their own potential for growth.

In summary, then, teachers learn from one another by talking about their teaching, observing different teaching techniques and sharing resources. What they have not had the opportunity to do is observe each other teaching for the purpose of providing specific feedback about teaching technique.

Sharing of resources. In this school teachers are encouraged by administrators and colleagues to experiment with new techniques and ideas. The sharing of resources is therefore important and becomes a natural and integral part of collaboration. Searching for new materials; pooling of resources such as films, filmstrips and reading materials; or canvassing the community for appropriate guest speakers, resource people and field trips are time consuming tasks that can be effectively shared among the members.

Other teachers within the school also take the initiative to avail themselves as a resource. The teacher librarian is one such individual who is also considered a valued member of the planning group. Not only does she provide the resources that are available in the library but she sets up centers to complement and enhance the themes teachers are doing in their classrooms.

Teaching each other the practice of teaching.

Collaborative interactions are clearly more than the sharing of materials. Terri describes the difference:

> When we didn't conference plan we sometimes shared material by saying "When you're finished with this would you pass it on to me next", or "When I'm finished with this I'll pass it onto you." We didn't get the benefits of the strengths, the weaknesses, what to change, what was good about it, how I would do it differently next time, all of those kinds of things.

In other words teachers have the ability to teach each other what they have learned about teaching. An experience that Terri had with another teacher illustrates just how teachers can share their craft knowledge to improve the instructional quality of colleagues:

> One of my students had written a story he was really proud of but it was a disaster. I couldn't find anything good to say about it other than "great ideas." I had to do something so I went to Joan who is our expert in the area and I said, "I'm the student who wrote this, conference with me," and so she did. And, oh, it was so good! I went back and did what she did with me and it worked so beautifully.

Learning how to teach from "expert" teachers stimulates and promotes the development of both parties. The expert is reassured that what he or she is doing in the classroom is effective and valued by other members; the learner benefits from the expertise of this colleague, improving some specific teaching practice and gaining confidence in this practice.

Susan also shares how teachers in her planning group watch each other teach. The strengths of each teacher are

recognized and used to improve the practices of others. "Watching each other teach" is seen as a very informal act that does not involve "the post conferencing idea of what was wonderful or what was the growth area. We would just thank each other and grow from it."

"Watching each other teach" is not a common occurrence for all members on staff and one that Janet believes is a missed opportunity. She says, "I feel, personally, we don't learn enough from each other where we could. We're such a valuable resource to each other." She attributes this to the belief that "a lot of people find it too threatening" to participate in this process.

Some go outside their cooperative planning groups to learn from other teachers. One such example is the drama teacher, of whom I spoke of earlier, who offers his expertise to assist teachers interested in integrating more drama into their curriculum. Janet also describes how the physical education teacher helped her learn how to teach a dance unit.

Theme planning. How different teams involved in theme planning accomplish this task may be slightly different in the specifics but similar in the objectives and design. Each begins by determining what theme it is they want to pursue and through the process of brainstorming and classification they develop a model for their theme. Matching objectives to the curriculum, accommodating

different learning styles, and evaluating the finished product are important elements of this process.

Sharing Student Concerns

Teachers have learned that sharing concerns they have about individual students with colleagues is very helpful. Because they share similar experiences they are confident that the advice that is offered will be meaningful and helpful:

> Sometimes we have a problem, a behaviour problem or a motivation problem, and when the three teachers get together it is like a shoulder to cry on. Because you get pretty close with the teachers that you're working with like that, you can share that problem. Then the three teachers sit down and think "O.K. how can we help you help this child," or to give some suggestions as to things that have helped in dealing with children.
>
> You may do that with other teachers in the school but it's a matter of getting together with the same teachers once a week and those kinds of problems or sharing comes out more. Also, you're dealing with the same age child so you would have lot better answers, probably, then someone else that's dealing with an older or younger child.

Accessing the administrative team to discuss specific concerns, then, becomes a last resort, not because they are unreceptive or unhelpful but because in working together teachers have learned how valuable their colleagues' opinions and advice are.

What Teachers Value About Collaboration

One question that was asked of each of the participants

during the interviews was how they felt about these interactions. Responses to this question continually reiterated the belief that collaboration was valued among the staff because it focused on learning and had a direct impact on the student. Teachers have come to understand that the challenges which each faced were similar and that by combining their talents and expertise opportunities for growth and development was enhanced. This section will look at what it is that teachers value about collaboration in terms of what they learn during the process, how it improves the decisions they make, how it makes them more efficient and what advantages there are for their students.

Learning About Teaching

There is a certain confidence expressed in knowing teachers can learn from one another, the decisions they make are better because of these interactions, they learn more about how to implement these decisions and they feel much better about the decisions they have made. Laura's comparison with a previous teaching experience illustrates what she has learned about collaborative relationships:

> In the [time] that I've been at this school I've grown more as a teacher. I've learned more. I've become more aware of just everything to do with education because I've had that sharing experience and it's not just the sharing with my two Grade Five people but everyone. Just the whole sharing aspect of the school. I've grown leaps and bounds in everything. My ideas towards education and teaching are just so much stronger and healthier in this situation than when I was in isolation

> there, because you are, you're by yourself. It's much better here, much more beneficial. If something is not working very well for you, in the old situation I'd have to work through it myself, and sometimes it just didn't work, and I just left it. But here you work through things because the other people are doing it with you, or they might have another method or another way of doing it so that encourages you.

Not only is there opportunity to grow and develop as a teacher when they accept that they can learn from other teachers but their own commitment as a teacher is strengthened in the process. There is a renewed enthusiasm toward their work. As Laura said, "You can learn more and get a lot more ideas from each other rather than just one person working in isolation."

"Knowing the kind of richness that you could get from each other, it just seemed like the way to do it," was the way Susan expressed it.

Accepting that teachers can learn from one another and discovering this "richness" has occurred more naturally for some individuals than for others.

One teacher whose group was not as collaborative this year, meeting more for the purpose of sharing resources and not as frequently to learn from one another, reported how she missed having the opportunity to observe how other teachers plan their lessons or brainstorm for new ideas together. This reluctance to share she believes may stem from a lack of self-confidence, "feeling intimidated a bit, and feeling that what you're doing in your room isn't up to

par with everything else that's happening."

Assistance in Decision Making

Because of their collaborative activities many teachers at Maple are no longer alone in making the multitude of decisions that are expected of them. Terri believes this support is what has improved her as a teacher:

> Oh they've changed me completely, from being a very rigid person to being a very flexible, open teacher who maybe focuses not so much on a task as on learning. I feel so much broader.

Not only has it improved her teaching practice but she has been rejuvenated as a teacher:

> When I came to this school I just got recharged. I would sing all the way here on Monday mornings because it was so nice to be a professional person and be treated as a professional person and thought of as one, and use my professional expertise, comfortably knowing that was going to be o.k.

She also believes that others benefitted from these collegial relationships which is obvious in their treatment of one another:

> They come to the staffroom and they're so glad to see each other. They say, "You know I tried what you said and it really worked!" This is the kind of dialogue that goes on.

Teachers also reported feeling that the stress that often accompanies the responsibilities of teaching is lessened when teachers can work collaboratively. Two or three teachers working on the same unit lightens the "workload" as well as draws from a "wealth of knowledge and

experiences."

The encouragement and suggestions that colleagues offer one another when they are faced with making difficult decisions is valued and teachers who were supported in this manner believed decisions made by group consensus tended to be better than those made alone. Laura shares these thoughts about this support:

> It's less stress on the teacher because you're planning a unit together. It is not like doing it by yourself. You have three people working at it so the job isn't as huge. You can just share the actual time, and energy, and effort, so it's less stress on the teachers. It is going to make their job easier and having a bouncing wall, or whatever you call it, with the other teachers.

Joan describes meeting with her cooperative planning team to plan field trips, celebrations or other activities as improving the efficiency of the planning process:

> Initially it seemed like an insurmountable problem in terms of getting the field trip planned and going to two different venues on the same day and taking in as much as possible. As we discussed the various possible solutions we arrived at one which I think was most beneficial to us and will be a super field trip for the children. Secondly we were concerned about how we were going to set up our displays for Education Week and eventually arrived at what I think are excellent, excellent possibilities for two venues rather than just one, and the possibility of giving the parent the best idea of what the children are doing.

This is precisely what Susan values about meeting to share with other teachers. Simply and directly stated, "Obviously, it gives you more ideas. Three heads are better than one."

Participants say that what they usually do when they

meet to cooperatively plan is brainstorm for ideas. Janet explains that the rules she teaches her students about brainstorming are the same that apply in adult circles.

> At the brainstorming level you are not judging, you are hitch-hiking off other people's ideas. You must build your relationship first and make people feel safe. "Don't shake my confidence at an early stage." It is a bouncing board for ideas acting to "amplify" what one already knows.

Janet also believes that teachers who understand this unwritten rule seem to be more successful in a collaborative relationship.

Allows for Individual Differences

Working collaboratively does not mean that teachers must work together on all aspects of teaching. On the contrary. The teachers interviewed all recognized the value of the learning opportunities available because of collaboration but also believed that there was still the need to be recognized as individuals and as unique:

> This doesn't mean that all teachers must teach the theme in precisely the same manner. We have the same philosophies about kids, but yet we are ourselves. It's very important to me to have that flexibility within our theme planning that I can be me as a teacher, and I don't have to clone what Sara does in her room because maybe I don't want to do everything she wants to do. Maybe I'll take an idea that she brings out during Cooperative Planning and I think it's a great idea but I will improvise it and do it, make it fit differently.

Some collaborative groups recognize the necessity of this flexibility and learn to balance individuality and sharing more effectively.

Need For Moral Support

Sharing with other teachers does not always have to focus on learning about the teaching process. Teachers need other teachers just to talk to, someone who shares the same frustrations and problems. Laura describes it this way:

> If you're feeling bad about something and it's not working out, you have someone to talk to that about. It can make your lessons so much easier because you've had someone to share them with. Or, they've done a lesson and that doesn't work, you better not try it. So that kind of thing too.

Janet also likes having another teacher with whom she can "touch base." She says that taking the time from busy schedules when you "can sit down and say, 'How are things going?'" is valuable in itself, or sharing past experiences, "like the most embarrassing thing that happened in the classroom, or how you handled this thing or that."

Teachers come together for professional reasons but what often happens is that many of these relationships develop into friendships; "You feel more like a kindred spirit with them (other teachers) because we have, we're dealing with the same kinds of things."

Teachers interviewed spoke about how these personal relationships had developed and now extend beyond the school walls. Several believed that these friendships now formed would continue long after the professional relationship would end.

Personal Rewards

When teachers learn to work together collaboratively they discover that they have a great deal of expertise to offer one another and their "strengths come out in many different ways." They bring to the group their own knowledge and experience and through group interaction they learn to question and reflect on their ideas, learn more about the instructional practice and feel more confident about what they are doing.

In a cooperative planning group that I observed each member of the group naturally assumed the role of "resident expert" in some area of the curriculum and acted as consultant to the other members. What developed was the certainty that what they were doing in the classroom was right and good for their students.

When I asked Joan how interactions with teachers had affected her as a teacher her response was:

> Just tremendous growth as a teacher. It's broadened my perspective, made me do a lot more thinking, made me more reflective on the kinds of activities, also opened me to sharing in a much more responsive manner.

Laura sees the reward being in the stimulation that comes from working with other enthusiastic teachers:

> So you don't get into the doldrums as easy as when you're by yourself. They also keep you, you know, energetic and keep you enthusiastic and keep you on track. Because you've got two people that are working with you and you're trying to stay at the same pace. You don't have that chance at sliding if you were by yourself.

Not only are teachers rewarded because they feel more certain about their practices but there is also the reward in knowing that their work will benefit others. Terri tells how the reward comes directly from the sharing. "I'm so happy. I've worked so hard, and it's nice to know that it's going to be shared. A lot of other children are going to benefit from this work."

These experiences also offer teachers leadership opportunities. In helping one another they come to realize that they possess some expertise that is valued by other members in the organization, raising their level of confidence, compelling them to strive for continued improvement and setting examples for others to follow.

What is nurtured as a result of this is the belief that each is a professional and as stated earlier in the chapter "encourages teachers to move forward in their practices" and in so doing demonstrates commitment to the practice of teaching.

Empowerment of teachers is another reward that results from this collaboration. Teachers come to realize that they are in the position to initiate innovations and because these innovations are based on sound teaching practices they will be supported by colleagues and administration. An example of the extent of this empowerment is demonstrated in one of Janet's comments. She believes that as a colleague she can model the process of sharing. She describes it this

way:

> I can't make them share or contribute, but I think if I model, and that's what I've done this year. I've offered, "I'm doing this. Do you see value, and do you want to do that with your kids? Can I make you a copy?" or "I read this. This was great. How does it sound to you?" So I'm trying to model it for them, hoping that they will reciprocate or will share. That's how I'm going to take it on.

Student Benefits

All of the participants interviewed believe that student learning is enhanced as a direct result of the sharing that occurs at Maple. "There isn't any way that they don't benefit. There is not one negative from the child's point of view," was the general response given when I asked the participants to share how they felt interactions with fellow teachers affected their students.

Evidence of these effects will be presented by using the participant's voices only, allowing the reader to experience first hand why teachers believe that participation in collegial relations benefit their students.

What must be clarified first, however, is that student achievement at this school is not determined simply by an assessed score on an achievement test. Learning at Maple encompasses the emotional and social growth of each child as well and this is viewed as equally important. Measuring this aspect is not concrete and depends a great deal upon interpretations and observations by those same professionals which I have just identified. If we accept that they truly

are professionals, then we must accept their interpretation of what is observed and said.

Laura's interpretation of her students' attitudes set the context for the excerpts that follow:

> Here the children love to be at school. They want to be here and they like school. We're getting a real good feeling instilled in them to know that school isn't drudgery, you don't just come here and books, books, books, write, write, write. They know there are lots of good things happening here and they like to be here. That is another thing, I think Rose wants them to be happy here, she wants them to like to learn, and they are learning, just in different methods.
>
> We have the odd fun day where you throw the Leprechauns in and the "foots" and you get them all excited about magic. They are very happy and excited, and motivation certainly isn't a problem, in my class anyway.
>
> I came from another school where I had twelve kids in Grade 4 and I always thought "Wow, what a great class only twelve kids." Well those kids were a heck of a lot more work for me than the twenty-seven I have this year. It has nothing to do with numbers. It's the motivation, it was like pulling teeth to get them to learn, whereas the children here at Maple, they're just so different. They want to be here, they learn, they work hard when they're supposed to and yet they like being here.

The specific benefits identified by the participants include more learning opportunities for the students, more caring for the individual child, refinement and improvement of delivery of curriculum and more opportunity to learn social skills.

<u>More learning opportunities</u>. "I figure my children in class are getting so many more opportunities that they would never have gotten if I didn't have these people to work

with. You can't come up with all these things yourself. So it's three brains working together and that just triples the opportunities for the children in your class."

"Our team planning has helped us to give the tremendous variety of learning styles, abilities. For example in our learning centers, there are materials there for children who have great difficulty, there is material there for the gifted. In that way I think that it benefits all of them. It's non-threatening because they are doing what they can do. If they can fly higher, there is something there for them to fly higher."

"The children in this school probably get more than any other group in a school. In a way I think they're sometimes spoiled because they get to go on all these field trips, and they get the celebrations, and they get the special days that we have. They get a really well-rounded education. It's not just follow the curriculum. I came from a school where you just followed the curriculum and that's all basically what we did, we rarely got off of it. In this school we do follow the curriculum but so much more. Like there is oh, lots of other things happening."

"The opportunities that we're giving the children they're learning from them and it's a different type of learning like our Anti-Racial Discrimination Day."

<u>Students are cared for</u>. "I think the children are really cared for in this school and the teachers aren't here

just to teach them the curriculum either, they're here to give them lots of love, and care, and understanding. I think that this is an excellent school."

Curriculum is refined. "They benefit from our relationship with each other because we do a lot of sharing. If we had a film or a filmstrip and it was good then we would say, 'Look, this was great, would you like it? It has to go back tomorrow and I've made a review sheet.' I would give the introduction to your class because I have already seen it."

"We share resources so it's giving them more of an enriched learning experience. I think it gives more people knowledge because we're interacting more as teachers and so they get more of an enriched environment."

"We learn a lot from each other, and certainly I think it's most beneficial to the children because we're able to get a lot more ideas from each other rather than just one person working in isolation."

Students learn social skills. "We encourage the children to share within the classrooms, we share their work on the walls throughout the school, we share in our cooperative planning, and the children share amongst each other within the class."

"I think the junior high benefitted because they were put in the situation of having to teach to younger kids, so they had the confidence of knowing something that the other

kids didn't and being the bigger students, and I think it was good for their self-esteem as well."

"Teachers interacting with each other model for students how they, too, can behave affectionately and respectfully toward one another. The teasing that goes on between particular teachers helps students learn about affection through teasing. As one of the students said at our Anti-Racial Discrimination Day, 'Tease me because we like each other not because you want to hurt me.'"

Learning How To Work Collaboratively

How teachers learn to work collaboratively is dependent on many factors, of which the principal's role in creating the conditions for collegiality is possibly most essential. Other factors, however, must be considered because they, too, influence to varying degrees the success of collaborative interactions.

This category examines what it is teachers must do to work collaboratively, the difficulties that can be encountered during this learning process and what kinds of teachers other teachers prefer to work with. The principal's role in establishing collaborative relations will not be examined within this category but will be addressed in the category following.

What Teachers Do to Learn to Work Collaboratively

Learning to work collaboratively is not usually a simple process that happens because the principal has scheduled time for it. Teachers must recognize its value and realize that initially time will be consumed in learning how to work together in a manner most productive to the group.

Those willing to experiment with collaboration, continually re-evaluating and refining the process, are rewarded for their efforts. Those who have not accepted that working together on shared goals will be of benefit to the student continue to work in isolation.

Joan's recounting of how her group learned to work together illustrates the necessity for experimentation, risk-taking and the rewards for persistence:

> It was interesting because what we did was we just sort of jumped in on all fours and said, "oh all right we are going to do this." Then from there we had to do a little back tracking occasionally. Also sitting back and evaluating where we were going from where we started because it was very, very difficult, because we were sort of the pioneers in the school for doing this.

> I think we were very fortunate in that we had three people who were willing to take risks. Because in some cases it has been very difficult for people to do this and I think in hindsight, having taken the plunge and just plunged right in, it was a lot better than doing a little, a little, a little because it can become very discouraging if you only do that. I think what we did was not discouraging, it was frightening in a way but it wasn't discouraging. And then we re-evaluated what we were doing and sort of reassessed as we went along. It worked out really quite well.

> You get to a certain level with people that you're comfortable with and you work well with and they understand you.

For some the learning process is clearer and more straightforward. Susan explains why her group has had little difficulty learning to work together:

> It just seemed to personally be the same for us to just go ahead and discuss things and do them thematically. We came from the same place (previous grade level taught) and so it was just really easy to just dialogue together. We all think the same way I guess. We have the same philosophies about kids.

Why Some Teachers Cannot Work Collaboratively

What seems to be a prerequisite for creating collaborative relationships is the need for members of the group to share a common philosophy and a similar teaching style. How different the members are and how many members are receptive to the process seems to determine how successfully collaborative relationships can be created.

Janet describes how these differences in philosophy determined the extent the group supported one another in improving their practices as teachers:

> I think we had three totally different personalities, so we each brought our own kind of characteristics to our cooperative planning. We shared a lot, but at the same time, because our styles were so different, a couple of us opted to go our own way, so we didn't, again, plan as deeply as we could have, I think.

The differences that were encountered in Janet's cooperative planning group were enough to make this group's

planning time less productive. Sharing time was limited to the sharing of resources with little emphasis on improving the practice of teaching.

Susan also sees group size as an important factor in determining how teachers can effectively collaborate. She has experienced working with two, three and four colleagues, "two was great, three was great, four was almost mind boggling." When I asked her why she perceived it this way her response was:

> Just too many minds. So what we would do with some themes is break up into two and two and then refocus. You just couldn't get enough talking done in your forty minutes to have everybody share their ideas. You wouldn't get anywhere.

Ownership accounts for another reason why teachers cannot work collaboratively. There seems to be a very fine line between allowing for individual differences and still being collaborative. Susan spoke about a teacher who had a great deal of difficulty giving up that ownership and sharing with teachers in her cooperative planning group. She felt that this could have been related to her "self-concept." "I think maybe she felt her ideas weren't as good as some of the other ones."

Another factor that teachers perceive as a reason why teachers will not commit themselves to the concept of "uninhibited" collaboration is their lack of confidence. Susan alluded to this briefly when she spoke about a teacher who had difficulty sharing in her group. If teachers

question their own practices and believe that what they have to offer is not valued then it is reasonable to expect that they will feel threatened by the process. "When you lack self-confidence you're not eager to share ideas or even share what you're doing in your room, because you're worried that it's not up to par with everything else that's happening."

Janet and Terri also refer to the difficulties encountered when new members join. Because Maple is regarded as an exemplary school and because of the visual display that fills all the hallways and classrooms new teachers to join are "overwhelmed at first." One teacher recalls how she felt when she was interviewed for a position at the school, "I thought, 'I don't fit in here. I can't possibly fit in here, there's too much happening and every thing looks so wonderful.' I didn't think I could be good enough to teach here."

Eventually this overwhelming feeling is replaced with confidence because teachers realize that they can contribute and what it is that they do share is valued.

Teachers With Whom Other Teachers Prefer to Work

Each teacher interviewed provided their own scenario of with whom it was they preferred to work. The following passages are representative of some of these statements; the underlined words highlight what I believe are the key

components:

> Obviously, if you're going to be working together you need someone that wants to share. Someone with a sense of humour, someone that you can joke around with and not really be totally serious with all the time. There was a girl that worked on our team and I found it very different because she was very quiet. I would go into a room sometimes and find that she was doing things that she didn't share, like making crafts and stuff. It went with the themes that we had talked about and she would just be totally silent and that bothered me, it really bothered me so I suppose I expect real openness.
>
> The first thing that comes to mind is personality, I suppose. Maybe knowledge of how to organize something like this as well, experience of working with other people. I think sometimes in some schools sharing is not valued. I suppose that would be one of the major stumbling blocks. Or somebody not wanting to share or not realizing the value of sharing, maybe not so much not wanting to but not realizing how valuable it is.
>
> I would say number one is flexibility. If you are not flexible you will have a difficult time handling the situation. If you are flexible you will love it because there is every opportunity. But I think sometimes people develop the flexibility too, and you know it's kind of fun to see that happen in some people as well.
>
> Somebody whose philosophy of education and who's values are very close to my own. Otherwise I can't do it, I cannot work with people I do not respect and I'm thinking only professionally because their private life doesn't enter into this. I could not work with a teacher that didn't really love the kids, or care about the kids, or care about them growing and learning. I could not work with a teacher that was very negative and critical and put down children, or gave up on children, I couldn't, I could not work with that.

Since teaching at this school, Janet has had the opportunity to work with four different groups. In the following passage she describes the group that she worked

best with and why:

> I think our styles were very much alike. All three of us were very thorough. All three of us I don't think were threatened by sharing, and I think a lot of teachers are. I think we were generous: "Oh, I've got this," and I opened up my file and said, "Look through that, see if there's anything there you think that we could use," so we shared our ideas. So the brainstorming sessions were great. They brought experience, because they had the Grade 3 before, and I just brought new ideas, I guess, because I was from a different grade, so they valued my new ideas, and I valued their experience, so together it was a really good mix.

In summary, teachers who have learned how to work together believe that what is needed to facilitate this process smoothly is a similar philosophy about education, a flexible learning style and a willingness to share. Those who do not possess these qualities will experience more difficulty and depending on the level of comfort in sharing the work and the willingness to work together, successful collaborative relationships may or may not develop.

Terri was also asked what she would do if, by chance, a teacher to join her team planning group was someone with whom she would have difficulty working. This was her response:

> I think the rest of us would win them. By sharing similar situations and positive ways we've dealt with and talking about our successes that we have. I think we would win them. I believe that we'd win them, there's not a question in my mind who would win.

The difference between this statement and that of Janet's is in the number of teachers that need to be "won."

If two members of a group of three have similar philosophies and believe in the value of collaboration, then the third will be more prone to adopting the process, but if it is two who do not see the value and one who does, developing collegial relations is far more difficult. Janet cannot see this working unless an expert from outside the group is brought in to "teach" the process.

What Discourages Collaborative Efforts

Other factors that go beyond group dynamics sometimes make it difficult for teachers to work collaboratively. One is the instability in the membership that may change each year for various reasons. The second is the timetabling arrangement between the junior high and elementary classes. The third is the location of classrooms. The following discussion will examine each of these factors.

Changing teaching assignments. Learning how to work together is an ongoing process that continues even after collaborative relationships have been developed and teachers feel comfortable with the decisions their group makes. What concerns these teachers is the insecurity that they feel in knowing that the group that they have learned to work with so well one year may not be the same group they work with the next. "You get to a certain level with people that you're comfortable with and you work well with and they understand you."

Teachers retire, take extended leaves or change their teaching assignments and teachers unfamiliar with the process may fill these positions making it difficult for both the senior teachers and the new teacher. Several of the teachers shared the difficulties they experienced when new members joined their group:

> Initially it's difficult because they aren't always aware of what the expectations are within the group. Also it's difficult for them to come in and take over a certain activity, when they again are not exactly sure of the expectations.

> We (established group members) know what each other are thinking, we work together, our units are all planned together, so somebody coming in new who doesn't know our system and comes in is going to be really uncomfortable. It makes it very difficult at first.

Not only is it difficult for the established members, the new member joining is put in a difficult situation. Laura talks about feeling overwhelmed because her colleagues are so experienced and work so well together. "It's like panic, 'Oh no, I've got to do all these things now.'"

This feeling of incompetence could continue if the group one was working in was insensitive to these feelings. Fortunately for Laura her group valued her contributions and made an effort to make her feel like a member of the group.

> I think that's because we've given her the opening to get in, help to plan and also to share her ideas, share what she's doing and make her feel comfortable about that. We felt very comfortable about giving her the things that she needed to begin her themes with. So I think again it's the sharing, and she realized that it is sharing and that not only do we want her to, but the expectation is that she will be a part of it.

Laura agrees with this interpretation:

> I'm certainly the person that has benefitted most from it because they've been doing it before. They're so helpful. I'm really lucky they're so supportive and anytime I have a problem they're always there ready to help me. They've been excellent guiders and facilitators for me.

Janet found that because she joined the staff in the middle of the year she didn't feel comfortable taking the themes that the others had developed and adopting them as her own. She felt she needed to work on her own and gain more confidence in her own practice before working with a group on theme planning. The following year she joined group and tells about the experience:

> We were really into planning. It was fantastic. We'd brainstorm; sitting together we'd come up with all kinds of ideas: "I'll do this, and you do that. That sounds great. We'll do this." It was wonderful. It started off very good.

Scheduling changes. Because Maple is an elementary/junior high school timetabling classes is not as straightforward as it would be in a regular elementary school. Through the years this school has experimented with different configurations in the timetable in an effort to develop one that will work most efficiently for the most number of people. This year separate timetables were created for the elementary and junior high. What this meant was that periods taught did not begin or end at the same time, nor did the lunch hour. This made the cross grading and sharing of expertise a little more difficult. Janet describes how it affected her:

> We get out at five to twelve, and the junior high staff gets out at five after, so there's a ten-minute difference. So what I'm finding is, I go to lunch, and I have my lunch, and we don't take a long time to eat in this school; you never do when you're teaching, but a lot of the time, by the time the junior high staff come, we've already finished eating. I find that that's put some space between the junior high and the elementary teachers.
>
> Unfortunately, this year it (cross grading) hasn't worked out, I think because of the time blocks, number one; the blocks don't coincide, the junior high and the elementary.

Location. Maple is a large school with a population of over 700 students and teachers believed that depending on where classrooms are placed will determine how much teachers can interact with those at the same grade level. Janet explains how this was limiting for her, "If you don't just happen to be in the neighborhood, you don't do a lot of talking, unfortunately, just because of the size of the school."

Large size and classroom location have some other drawbacks. "I'm finding that where your room is makes a big difference as to who you mix with and who you get a chance to see, or even knowing what's happening in the school. I feel a little bit isolated here in this portable."

Principal Facilitates Collaboration

To set the context for principal as facilitator of collaboration we must first gain some understanding of the vision and goals of this principal. Rose articulates the

belief that the culture of an organization is "an invisible force, it's what's beneath the surface, it's the way you really are." Her responsibility, then, is to bring the symbolic elements of the culture to a "conscious level so people truly have an understanding of what it is, discover the values that are present and uncover firmly held beliefs."

With this framework established a clearer view of how she creates a climate for collaboration begins to develop. Principal articulating a vision and principal creating a climate for collaboration, the two categories examined here, will give the reader a clearer understanding of how Rose accomplishes this task.

Principal Articulates a Vision

Rose strongly believes leaders of organizations must "know what it is they really believe in so that all the decisions that are made, and all the things that happen in that organization, are focused on that belief."

She also believes that if you want to learn what it is you really believe in you "have to examine your values and what it is you're all about, and what you're trying to accomplish."

There are several beliefs that guide Rose in making the decisions she does. The first is her belief in "humanizing the learning environment." What she means by this is that

the "people who are in that organization have a sense of who they are and where they are going." Her responsibility then, is to "make sure that everybody feels that they are valued and are part of the environment, or part of that organization." Included in this is "helping people recognize their gifts and their gifts of others. That people somehow have the freedom to share their gifts and not feel by doing so that they're showing off."

Terri's statement that follows is evidence that this belief has become internalized in her staff; "I have never in my whole life felt as free to use all my gifts and talents in my classroom and with the staff in so many ways." Janet's recognition of why the school is "so strong" also confirms that teachers here do feel valued; "At first you don't realize that it's everybody together that makes that strength. It's not just made up of very strong individuals; it's the combination that makes us strong."

Rose also believes that the visual impact (art displays, posters, thought provoking messages) referred to at the beginning of this chapter helps to humanize the environment. "Sometimes people are overwhelmed by it (the visual impact), but it's not because we just want the school to look nice, or we want it to be pretty, or whatever. It's because we really want the people in that building to know that they are valued, and one way to show them that is by displaying what they do."

Another strong belief that Rose articulates is "that the environment needs to be student-centered." Centering on students at Maple concentrates on more than academic achievement; their social and emotional well-being is of equal importance. "We must show that we have faith in them and that we believe in them no matter what is happening. There's always a sense of hope, that we never leave students feeling that it's a hopeless situation, and that they can never go forward, that there is no light at the end of the tunnel for them."

A third belief articulated is that of "building community." Building community, to Rose, means that the "I" beliefs must move to a "we" believe creating a "sense of unity and something that the whole community works together on." This doesn't happen with the principal "laying it on" but as a staff developer she provides opportunities for staff to reflect on what they really value to move them toward this shared vision. Being a staff developer, Rose says, is one of the most exciting things she does with the staff. "I try to analyze maybe not only what their needs are, but the needs of the school and the needs of the kids, and try to bring that all together to move people in a positive direction to get them excited about their profession."

Creates a Climate for Collaboration

Rose sets the tone for staff collaboration during staff development meetings and encourages, through her actions, extension of this collaboration into all other areas of a teacher's teaching life. She sees collaboration as a vehicle that will "move the staff forward, help them to recognize their gifts and become a very integral part of the organization."

She also believes she is the catalyst in facilitating the necessary conditions which include her role as staff developer, her modelling of commitment, her encouragement to experiment and take risks, assigning cooperative planning time and selecting new staff members. Each of these will now be addressed.

Role as staff developer. Staff development is treated as a priority at this school because Rose sees it as a way of providing teachers with the opportunity to learn more about the practice of teaching, to build morale and "build in that bonding component."

Her belief about building community focuses on teaching teachers the value of one another and the sharing of their gifts and talents. She accomplishes this in several ways. One is simply in the physical arrangement of the meeting. Teachers sit at circular tables encouraging interaction among them. Another is in the delivery of the meetings. Very often she facilitates the process in a manner similar

to the cooperative learning strategy that teachers use in their classrooms, working together on the process of learning. A third way that Rose nurtures collaboration is the activities themselves. The staff work on developing a common creed together, learn new teaching strategies or participate in activities that build morale and self-esteem. From these exercises teachers find out about their "own gifts and strengths" and learn to recognize "what we have and what others have" and share these gifts. They come to understand that their goals of education are the same and naturally continue to work collaboratively on projects directly related to the classroom.

A final thing that Rose does during staff development is she relates her own experiences about how sharing has benefitted her and her belief that "the more you share, the more you have." One experience, in particular, needs to be shared:

> I had this phenomenal art program. I thought it was a wonderful art program, anyway. Most of the ideas I'd stolen. My first three years I was in a particular school, and when I left that school I had everybody's best art project in my file folder. When I went on to a new school, of course, I had this wonderful stuff to do in art. What was really upsetting was, the teacher who taught the year before -- I taught Grade Five, and she taught Grade Four -- one week later she did my art project. I remember sharing with the staff how annoyed I was about that, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me, because it forced me to find something new.

That the staff has adopted this same philosophy was illustrated in several of the statements made by the

participants earlier in this chapter.

Assigns cooperative planning time. Rose does more than talk about the value of sharing. She "lives her creed" by providing all elementary teachers with a forty minute time slot each week where teachers from the same grade level can meet to plan together.

Having this time together means that teachers do not have to meet as often on their own time to work together, which several reported they still do.

Teachers are encouraged to experiment. The risk-taking environment created for students also applies to the staff. Rose says, "I'm wanting them to be able to almost celebrate their errors so that they can realize that if they make mistakes, it's just saying, 'I have something to learn.'" She also says that she would rather teachers "take risks and try new things than to play it safe and always do things the same way." She loves to look at the "successes and the failures and say 'Now, what could we have done in this situation? What would have been better?'" Janet tells how she has appreciated this in Rose:

> What else have I learned? Just have confidence to try things, take risks and not worry. If they don't work, they don't work. Because she does that, she'll try things and if they don't work, well, chalk it up to a learning experience. It didn't work and we won't do that next year! So that feels good to know that.

Not only are teachers encouraged to take risks there is a genuine effort by Rose to have teachers feel appreciated

for what they do. "I've come to discover, I think, that if you really believe in your people, and have confidence in your people, it'll happen." She often refers to the terms "authentic" and "real." "I don't think you can go around to people saying 'you're really doing a good job' if you really don't mean it. They will pick that up in two seconds if you're just going around giving little pats on the back just because it's that time that you should be doing it, people will know."

The following passages illustrate that teachers at this school truly do feel that they are appreciated and supported:

> Knowing that my principal, whatever I decide she believes so much in me, she will back me and she will help with materials, and she will rejoice in the successes. I think knowing that, is such a tremendous feeling because it hasn't always been this way.
>
> As you make contributions, you feel more comfortable, you feel more confident. Rose has built in such a strong support system that she lets you know that you are valued with little notes, a pat on the back here and there, etc.
>
> The freedom, the absolute freedom and the what shall I say, the confidence in the realization that you're expected to be a professional, it's just, that's the way it is. There is no one ever at any time looking over your shoulder or worrying about you. I suppose there might be if you did something, you know, really strange or whatever but ordinarily on a day to day basis you are treated as a professional. You have a freedom to explore different kinds of educational possibilities, within the realm of reason, of course.
>
> The approval, the support, the encouragement, the appreciation. When she comes in and smiles her

> approval as she looks at each group working everywhere, and the teacher's busy working with only one and everybody else is doing something valuable. She looks at you and she smiles, it's so nice.

One of the creeds written by the staff at the beginning of the year, "Affirming the goodness in one another, that we find ways to affirm one another, that we find ways to be supportive of one another," summarizes beautifully why Maple has been successful in moving teachers to share in their work. It also puts into writing what was clearly evident in many of the discussions that I had the opportunity to observe.

As a model. Rose sees herself as a very important model in the school and shares what is really important to her. "In sharing my beliefs, I think the staff were able to see how I approached it and what it meant to me and how I live it out." Therefore what she wants her staff to practice she too must do.

This modelling begins with Rose's first goal of "humanizing the environment" and the need to "make it speak of us." Her office and the halls set an example for teachers in the classroom:

> Rose's office is wonderful. It's so warm, it feels so human. You can see her personality is all over it, and when you see that, you want to make your room like that, too, because it feels so good. You want to take that into your classroom as well.

Sharing her expertise is one of these practices. The frequent workshops that she does for other staffs, sharing

the gifts of Maple with others, is her way of modelling it, as well as her way of sharing her staff's talents:

> We share with a lot of other teachers from other schools and people come in and see it. I think it's letting the staff know it's important to share their talent.

Modelling commitment to improved practice is also important to Rose. She demonstrates commitment to improvement in her belief that she must "be really knowledgeable about learning" and therefore keeps current by continually taking new courses. "Maybe it'll be a week immersed in whole language, or maybe it'll be a week immersed in something else . . . but probably something in curriculum. I've taken courses in cooperative learning and learning styles and all those things which I think are really important skills for me to have."

Teachers are encouraged by this and there seems to be more interest in their own professional development. Teachers are often attending both district and out of district workshops as well as evening credit courses.

Rose is also a principal who spends a great deal of time at the school outside school hours. Teachers are aware of this and are influenced by it:

> I think we put in more work overall as a school, as a whole. But it's not because someone's making us do it, or maybe it is that, but more it's subconsciously we're getting the message. I don't know what it is but I want to do more and I think the teachers want to do more. It's not because they feel they have to but to feel comfortable, maybe. They want to do that to feel like they're contributing to everything that our school is

about.

> I've spent many Sundays here, evenings here or even long hours at home. That's because I wanted to and, again, I think, because Rose's here a lot on Sundays, too, I just see that need. I admire that kind of dedication. So it's always comfortable knowing that we could come into the school and it's not going to be empty. The lights are going to be on, she may be working in her office, or maybe she's walking around, or that another teacher will be working, too.

Rose's attitude and the way she approaches her tasks influences her staff in their behavior. Janet tells about how Rose's positive attitude has helped her immensely. "Getting on a positive mindset helped so much in everything," she said. Janet also says that Rose's assertiveness has been a positive influence on her:

> She is a real pusher. She will look at every avenue into getting something that we want, and I like that. So the idea of not being so passive, but look into it. It never hurts to ask, you never know what's going to be out there. So she's really taught me that.

Rose's practice of sharing her beliefs; sharing her expertise and commitment; modelling positive attitudes, dedication and assertiveness are those characteristics that the participants whom I spoke with referred to as influencing their behaviors.

Selection of new teachers. New members to join this staff are first interviewed by Rose. It is really important to her that before a teacher "comes on board" she or he understand the philosophy of the school and "what we are all about" and is willing to be a part of it. Laura recalls the

reasons why she thinks Rose selected her for this school:

> I'm a very positive person. I always look at the positive side of things and I'm enthusiastic and happy. I'm the type of person that will take on things if I need. If someone asks me to do something I will do it to the best of my ability. . . . I guess through the interview she just felt that I would fit in really well with the teaching staff.

Janet explains why she believes she became a member of this staff. Reasons that differ slightly from Laura's:

> Rose and I had a lot in common, I guess, the emphasis on professional development. That was always something that had been important to me. I was on a lot of committees [in previous assignment]. I was very involved in everything, so he [Janet's previous administrator] thought, "You would be great! You would be great for this." So I was approached by Rose.

Rose's ability to screen teachers for Maple may help to explain why the commitment to professional development was so clearly evident in the staff.

Themes Arising From The Data

Three pervasive themes have emerged after further examination of the data and these have served to clarify and deepen my understanding of what norms of behavior, with respect to collaboration, are inherent in the school culture and how they shape the way teachers perceive their teaching roles. The first, "sharing," is derived directly from the language of those interviewed. The second theme, "child-centered learning," is derived from one of Rose's belief statements and underlies the motive for the teachers' search for excellence. The third speaks about the professionalism

that epitomizes the attitude of members of this school.

Sharing

Sharing at Maple is not confined to scheduled interactions but is a norm that is clearly a part of the culture of the school. Sharing occurs frequently, with different groups of teachers, in many kinds of situations and where ever teachers may be found.

Teachers at the same grade level can be observed teaching each other the practice of teaching, drawing from the strength and support of colleagues, not only during scheduled planning time but whenever and wherever they meet. Sharing with different individuals also occurs for the purpose of exchanging teaching materials, debating philosophies or teaching practices. Teachers could be meeting as a staff reflecting on school practices and philosophy or exploring new options.

Sharing is not limited to the practice of teaching but extends into the teachers' more personal lives where friendships are developed and nurtured.

Honest, open communication occurs in each of these interactions and with it the trust and confidence to move forward and seek new challenges.

Staff pride in what they have accomplished originates at the school but there is the realization that sharing should not be limited to the professional within this school

culture but must extend into the realm of student teachers and fellow teachers in other school settings for the benefit of other learners.

Resulting from these norms of sharing and collaboration is the creation of a strong culture that binds teachers and administrators to common goals. In this culture improvement and change are valued and welcomed because teachers know that they will not be left alone to meet these new challenges.

What is instrumental in the creation of this strong culture at Maple is the leadership. Here the leadership works to create a culture that is accepted and cohesive, realizing that the more accepted and cohesive it is the better it can move toward the ideals it holds and the objectives it wants to achieve.

Child-centered Learning

During an ASCD workshop Rose spoke about the need to discover one's own personal creed. She begins this process with an "I statement of belief." From this individuals must then work out what the value of that belief is and whether these beliefs match their practices. Rose's personal creed is based on the understanding that all children have the potential for success and that we as educators need to learn how to recognize our gifts and "reward the best in everyone."

This creed, I believe, has been adopted by the teachers I observed and interviewed. What motivated them to become the best teachers they could was their concern for the individual child. They saw sharing as a vehicle that would improve their teaching practice. We need only refer to Terri's comment about how she went to one of her colleagues for help with one of her student's stories to confirm this. The staff's willingness to participate in the PSPP and the math workshops offered by the university were also illustrative of teachers' interest in innovative practices and individual learning styles.

They also believed that in creating a productive learning environment they were dealing with much more than the academics. A great deal of time was devoted to taking care of the emotional and social well-being of the student. Planning of numerous field trips, eating lunches with the students, participating in the celebrations organized by the school and those planned within the individual classroom and taking the time to talk to individual students during nonteaching time, I believe, is only some of the evidence supporting this claim.

What begins with the administrative team is articulated to the staff, energizing them into creating a much more productive learning environment for students and strengthening the belief that what they do makes a difference in their lives.

Staff Professionalism

When I reflect back on what it is that impressed me most about this staff I automatically think about their professionalism. There were so many opportunities available to this staff to become the best teachers they could be. They were encouraged to take risks, they had the freedom to experiment and the opportunities to become innovative. And with each of these situations the teachers I interviewed embraced these opportunities wholeheartedly.

Everything that I observed this staff doing seemed to be motivated by their professionalism. During recess and lunch breaks teachers were often observed talking about their practice or sharing what they had learned about a student that could assist in helping that student. The table in the staff room was always filled with pamphlets on workshops and inservices that were available to the staff. Staff were often observed perusing them, talking about sessions that were of interest and would assist them in improving some specific aspect of their teaching.

The sharing that is a very strong part of this culture allowed the opportunity for teachers to gain more confidence in their practice. They realized that they had gifts and talents that should be shared and that they too would benefit from this sharing. Knowing that they had the support and encouragement of fellow teachers and the administrative team in what they were doing encouraged them

to continue their search for more and better opportunities for their students.

There was a commitment to the teaching profession and the belief that they do make a difference in the lives that they have touched.

Staff development meetings, I believe, contributed a great deal to nurturing this professional attitude. It provided opportunities for teachers to reflect on the quality of their practice, motivating the staff to "move forward," continually reshaping their understanding of their teaching role. Moving the staff forward was guided by the need to create a strong culture that will bind teachers to common goals and shared values or what Rose refers to as "building community" where the potential of each human is honored. It was not approached in a way that teachers felt it was being implemented by the administrator but in a manner that all were able to contribute to its development.

What is also of interest is the teachers' own interpretation of what it meant to be a professional. The participants who referred to it saw it as allowing them to be the kind of teachers they could be, giving them the independence to make the decisions affecting their classrooms. They also connected it to professional development and believed that you could not maintain some semblance of professionalism if you did not keep up with the latest innovations and try to make some effort to

incorporate them into your teaching style.

The final chapter of this thesis presents my reflections and some implications for further study.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Reflections

No thesis can be complete without the opportunity to reflect on what it is the novice researcher has achieved. In retracing my journey through the development of this thesis several opportunities for reflection emerge and will be recounted in the categories below.

Determining the Problem

The task of determining an area of interest that would eventually become the subject for my thesis seemed at first to be insurmountable. With so many possibilities and so much that I was interested in, how could I narrow it down to one focus that I must then devote the next several months to, a focus not only relevant to me as an educator but to other educators who are also interested in the growth and improvement of the field of education?

What surprises me still is the ease in which this dilemma becomes resolved and why I did not recognize this as a focus for study earlier. I was enrolled in Dr. Linda LaRocque's course on Organization of School Districts that focused on the findings now published in the book Struggling to be 'Good Enough': Administrative Practices and School District Ethos. Many of our discussions concentrated on the

working relationships between central office and school administrators. This led me to think about my own experiences as a member of the staffs where I taught and about the relationships among the teachers and administrators as they existed.

One of my interests as a member of the last staff where I worked concentrated on developing continuity of programming between the grade levels, earning me the title of Articulation Coordinator. Such an undertaking required the collaborative efforts of all those involved, including the support of the administration. All or small groups of staff would meet to brainstorm for possibilities, eventually creating curriculum that we believed suited our needs. My teaching assignments during these years also varied creating numerous opportunities for interactions with different colleagues at the same grade level.

From these experiences I subconsciously developed my own theory about the collaborative process and only because of my membership in the school districts course did I come to realize that "testing" this theory would be excellent subject matter for my thesis.

Selecting Participants

My uncertainty about what criteria to use in selecting participants for the study created a few initial difficulties, forcing me to interview more than three

participants. The first three participants selected were very similar in that they all worked at the school for more than five years and all worked very successfully in collaborative situations. Reporting their perspectives only would have resulted in a description of the collaborative process that was too one-sided, deficient of the concerns and difficulties encountered. It was then that I decided to speak to two additional teachers who had experienced some difficulty working with other staff members.

Not only has the trustworthiness of this thesis been enhanced because of my interactions with five rather than three participants, but my own educational journey has been enriched. I have discovered how a staff learns to work together. I have learned what teaching means to each of these individuals. Most importantly, this newly discovered understanding has compelled me to reflect on and re-examine my own teaching practices and beliefs. It is with this assimilation of beliefs and commitment that I will continue my career as classroom teacher and administrator.

Naming of Participants

When I first met with the participants I suggested that if they wished they could choose pseudonyms that would identify them anonymously in the findings chapter. Terri chose this particular name after the pop singer, Teresa Brewer, whom she idolized as a teen. Laura said that this

was one of her favorite names and thought it appropriate.

The remaining participants were named after significant individuals in my life. Joan, a childhood friend whose career path has also led to the field of education, seemed a natural choice for the colleague and friend of Terri (the name that I am often identified by). Susan and Janet were chosen for friends and colleagues whose teaching philosophy, I believed, mirrored those of the "real" Susan and Janet.

Assigning pseudonyms in this manner was my way of furnishing a more personal attachment to these individuals. However, as I continued with my data collection this became less important and less significant. I gradually began to recognize them on their own merit rather than on the basis of comparison, creating new professional friendships that will continue beyond this study.

The Research Team

During my research methods course Dr. Linda LaRocque spoke to us about a project she was undertaking, involving the research of a new practicum project being implemented in three Alberta schools in the winter of 1991. Those that were interested and felt that their research topics were compatible with this project met with her after the class. What evolved from this meeting was a research team of seven Education Administration Master's students, coordinated by Linda. Each applied his or her problem to research specific

aspects of the practicum and the schools. We later identified this project as the Partnership Schools Practicum Project (PSPP).

The professional and personal relationship that has developed as a consequence of meeting regularly with this research team, sharing issues of significance, had numerous benefits. As a novice researcher I was continually faced with the insecure feeling that what I was doing may be inappropriate (I was continually concerned that I would unconsciously do something to breach ethical guidelines). Having this group of individuals with whom I could share my concerns and questions, who could probe and challenge me to delve deeper into my analysis and interpretations, was immensely beneficial and I believe improved the quality of my work for this thesis.

Another obvious advantage of being a member of this group was the participation in the "making" of six other theses. Not only am I becoming a "master" in the realm of the norm of collaboration but I have also shared in my colleagues' area of expertise.

The confidences and friendship that have emerged from this relationship cannot be overlooked. What has developed is a bonding among individuals whose interest in the educational process is shared and the confidence in knowing that if challenges arise someone from this group will have the expertise and interest to assist.

Significance of the Study

"Of what real significance can a Master's Thesis completed by the novice researcher have?" were my precise words during an earlier discussion with fellow Masters students. The reason for questioning the significance of our work arose after making the discovery that in all of my readings in the field of education I had yet to encounter reference to research completed in a Master's Thesis. This led me to question how it was we could contribute to a body of knowledge when our work goes virtually unrecognized by the established and reputable researcher.

If our research does not reach the professional researcher, who, then, is touched by this work and what is its true significance? Only now that my journey is coming to a close have I come to understand its true value.

Each of the participants whom I interviewed has grown because of this experience. Several of the participants commented on the value of having to share their thoughts and experiences with me. This exercise of verbalizing what is so often kept at the subconscious level, they said, was an exercise in confirming and validating some of their practices and questioning others. During a follow-up discussion one of the participants spoke about how the interview process had inspired her to think about how she could take a leadership role to improve the working relationship among teachers in her cooperative planning

group and make other changes that she now recognized were necessary. The participants were also very eager to share the practices at this school in the belief that through my thesis these practices would be communicated to other staffs, providing the opportunity for other school children to benefit from similar relationships and school practices.

Of possibly even more significance is my own growth from this experience. Having been in the position to observe this school culture, learning about the norms and values that guide their decisions, has had a major impact on me as teacher and administrator, guiding me in the reconsideration and re-evaluation of my own responsibilities to the field of education. And in these roles I, too, will influence those with whom I interact.

The uniqueness of this study and others like this conducted as a subset of a major study provides yet a somewhat different aspect to the significance of this thesis. Data that I have collected will continue to be used by my advisor, Dr. Linda LaRocque, and subsequent research teams. Through Linda and in joint publication the professional community, to which I referred earlier, will learn about these findings and hopefully gain a better understanding about what it was that created this teaching environment and how the practitioners adapted. The following year's research team will be given access to my data and will continue to develop understandings about

school culture, and in turn will benefit in ways similar to my own.

In this context, significance cannot be viewed as static or in the past tense but rather as ongoing and cumulative.

Methodology

Choosing how this study was to be conducted was not difficult. The positivistic approach of formulating a hypothesis that is experimentally tested by rigorously controlling variables was a strategy that I believed would be unsuitable for the kind of research that I was undertaking. I was also concerned with the requirement that positivistic research requires some degree of generalizability that will hold in contexts similar to that studied.

The naturalistic inquiry and its more holistic approach where a level of understanding about the school culture can emerge seemed the better alternative. Within this paradigm the danger of making generalizations and evaluating a culture by what may be inappropriate standards could be avoided.

Selection of the most appropriate data gathering procedure was also straightforward. After experimenting with the questionnaire for an assignment I realized that this technique did not allow participants to qualify or

develop further their responses or the researcher to interact to any substantial degree with the data or the research participant. The interview/observation approach, on the other hand, was more conducive to capturing the richness and complexity of the values held by the participants, allowing them to qualify and further develop their responses. It was also important to me that their interpretations could be communicated in their own language or voice and it would be these voices that would most effectively communicate what these participants believed and valued. The observations served to validate and qualify what it was these participants relayed verbally.

Struggling with the Terminology

When I first embarked on this topic for research I had attempted to formulate distinct definitions for the terms collegiality and collaboration and to incorporate both in my original problem statement. I then carefully reviewed the literature to find what it was that distinguished one from the other. After closely comparing definitions written by Coleman and LaRocque (1990), Hord (1986), Little (1982) and Rosenholtz (1989), I have come to believe that the two terms are interchangeable.

I decided to adopt the term "collaboration" in my own thesis for two reasons. The first was that educators who are not as familiar with this research are more apt to

associate teachers' working relationships with this term. Collegiality, I believe, may communicate to them what Barth (1990) describes as congeniality, "People enjoying each other's company and getting along" (p. 30). This does not sufficiently relay what it is these practitioners engage in. The second reason in choosing one term over the other is because of Little's (1982) operational definition of collegiality. The specific criteria associated with the definition did not entirely apply to the relationships of the participants as they were presented to me and therefore I thought it best not to confuse what it was I was describing with her criteria.

Relating the Findings to the Literature

When reviewing the literature for the purpose of the thesis I subconsciously linked how this knowledge fits with the findings of my study. An invaluable aspect of reflection, therefore, must be to provide this linkage and examine how one's findings relate to those who have completed research in comparable situations. The following subcategories represent some of the major themes presented in the literature and attempt to make these connections, providing for us yet a different way of representing Maple School.

School Effectiveness Studies

In Purkey and Smith's (1982) synthesis of six case studies on school effectiveness they found five factors that were common to most of the studies. I thought it would be interesting to see if Maple, a school described by many as exemplary in its practices, would also be considered as effective when evaluated on the basis of these same five factors.

The first, strong leadership by the principal, is clearly evident and was extensively reported in the findings. The second, high expectations by staff for student achievement, was not as evident as staff concern for the development of the whole child -- physically, mentally and emotionally, as well as academically. One participant shared her concerns about this, stating that consideration for a student's self-esteem sometimes stood in the way of setting higher expectations for student performance. The third and fourth, a clear set of goals and emphasis for the school and a school-wide effective staff training program, was the primary focus of their weekly staff development meetings, is visually displayed throughout the school and is evident in the undertakings of the staff. The last, a system for monitoring of student progress, was also in place at Maple (p. 65).

On the basis of these criteria Maple can be clearly labelled as an effective school. What is of interest is

that even though it appears to meet most of the criteria I was not given the impression that it was striving for this identification specifically. The primary concern was in improvement of the practice of teaching and not in meeting specific effectiveness criteria as is the case in many of the school districts reported in Purkey and Smith (1982) and Grimmett (1991).

The Successful School

Sergiovanni (1990) shares with his readers a new methodology for describing the successful school and espouses the need to trust those making these judgements even when the individual may not be able to articulate the specifics about what it is that is "good" about a particular school. It is this quality that distinguishes description of the successful school from the effective. It is not based on specific measurable criteria but is more "comprehensive and expansive" (p. 77).

When I first learned that I would be completing my study at Maple I questioned what it was that led the educational community to believe that the school was exemplary. At this time I was quite familiar with the effectiveness literature and was looking for answers based on its criteria. Only after reading Sergiovanni's work did I come to understand that meeting criteria specified by some outside expert would not necessarily be enough to determine

its success. My immersion in its culture and learning about its practices was what helped me to determine that Maple was successful and that I, too, would have difficulty narrowing down what it was that I based this decision on.

School Culture

The literature review typifies the productive culture as having a strong sense of community with shared goals, high expectations for staff and students, tightly structured beliefs and values with a loosely coupled organizational structure and mechanisms for sustaining motivation and commitment.

If we delve into our interpretations and evaluate Maple's culture we find that a great deal of time is spent at the school creating shared goals that are tightly structured. The weekly professional development meeting, staff visibility in terms of how they welcome and invite fellow educators and their eagerness to participate in projects such as the PSPP, are all demonstrative of a tightly structured culture that is built on high expectations. The loosely coupled organizational structure is a little more difficult to corroborate. On the one hand we see an administrator who is highly visible and knowledgeable about what teachers are doing beyond the classroom door. On the other, teachers speak about how they feel like professionals because they are treated that way,

i.e., make their own curriculum decisions, accounting for loose coupling of the organizational structure.

I am left with the question of how the principal can effectively balance tight structure and loose coupling to create a productive culture. Tipping the balance in either direction could lead to the development of an unproductive culture where teachers no longer strive for excellence and improvement.

The Collaborative Environment

"The community of learners" that Barth (1990) refers to describes what the principal and some of the teachers at Maple are trying to achieve. In this context opportunity for staff collaboration abound as staff search for better teaching strategies. However, Barth's statement that he does not see collegiality as "the natural state of things" (p. 32) and believes that it will "come only if it is valued" (p. 33) may help to explain why in an environment that encourages collaboration it does not always occur. In synthesizing the data presented I have come to believe that the term "value" in his statement comes with several conditions and, as is the case when you are building a tower of popsicle sticks or playing cards, if the foundation is deficient or one is removed the whole tower will topple. Such is the case with collaboration; conditions must be right for the nurturing of collegiality. In consideration of

these factors I would then expand Barth's definition to read, "Collaboration will come if it is valued by its members and with more ease when members share a similar belief system and teaching philosophy." An addendum must also be included that stipulates that the principal not only encourages but creates the conditions and the environment for collaborative interactions to occur.

What I also found of interest was that one of Little's four classes of interactions that she identified as "crucial" to collegiality were not uncovered at Maple. The second, which referred to teachers providing colleagues with useful critiques of their teaching, was not evident. Teachers reported that they watched each other teach and asked each other for advice about how to teach something specific but they did not engage in what one participant referred to as a Type A conference (referring to the peer coaching routines of Madeline Hunter) and what I interpret to be Little's description of "critiquing."

How can one interpret these data? Those participants who observed one another believed that what they were engaged in was extremely beneficial and did not express an interest in elaborating on what they were already doing. The participants who did not interact with other teachers for the purpose of improving their practice expressed an interest in doing so. They made reference to wishing they could observe colleagues teach a lesson in the same subject

area they taught or to the same children, but again did not go so far as to wish that their lessons could be critiqued. One participant stated that "evaluating lessons" would formalize their relationships, creating more pressure on individual teachers to perform, possibly resulting in teachers learning less from one another. Another thought that teachers felt threatened by this possibility because they lacked confidence in what they were doing.

Shared Leadership

I believe that on all counts and by all that is cited in the literature Rose would be considered an effective and productive leader. She had a vision that was clearly articulated and guided her in the decisions she made for staff and students.

What still remains a perplexing issue, for me, is how this strong leadership can be balanced and shared with staff. There was ample evidence suggesting that it does occur at the classroom level where the staff has professional autonomy and make decisions regarding curriculum. What is not as clear is how authority and responsibility were relinquished to teachers for other issues, for example, the organization of their celebrations.

Participants shared that what the school decided to celebrate was determined by the administrative team. During a staff development meeting everyone "pulled together" and

decided what they could do to participate in the event. Coordinating these activities was very often assumed by the administration as well. I suspect that it was this process that made Janet feel more like an observer than a participant in these events, lacking the ownership that responsibility for all aspects could have provided. It could also explain why Susan felt uncomfortable not knowing how "things would come together" when she first joined this staff. Now, she says, she has learned that "amazingly all things come together. It all just happens so why hassle yourself about it." She later qualifies this by stating that because this school has so many celebrations and special occasions it would be very difficult for teachers to get more involved than they already are. If they did, it would take away from their classroom responsibilities creating possible resentment because of the added stress.

Other teachers did not express this concern and felt that they contributed a great deal to the organization of these celebrations. These comments confound the difficulties leaders have in making decisions, not only is there the issue of shared leadership but also the issue of varying teacher expectations and interpretations of what is acceptable. How can the leader balance all of these expectations acceptably?

Imperfections Recognized

Lightfoot (1983) suggests that "goodness" should reflect not only "the current workings of the institution but also how far it has come and where it is headed" (p. 24). I see this as excellent advice for any researcher entering the domain of fellow educators. The observer can easily identify what is imperfect, if so inclined, and disregard the dynamics of the situation.

Sensitive to this possibility, Rose often shared with me her feeling that even though she believed this to be an excellent school there were many things that were "imperfect" about it. She believed that the challenge of being a leader was recognizing these imperfections and doing something about them.

Implications for Future Research

What then is the value of a collaborative culture and what is its role in shaping the way teachers understand the process of teaching? Several implications are evident. The first is that a collaborative culture seems to be one that is productive and that binds teachers and administrators to common goals and a shared vision. Improvement and change are valued and welcomed because teachers understand that they are not alone to meet these new challenges.

Also implied is the opportunity collaboration offers the practitioner to reflect on the quality of one's

practice. Staff are motivated to move forward, shaping their understanding of their teaching role. Moving a staff forward does not mean implementing programs decided by the administrator. It is guided by the shared vision that has been created and what Rose referred to as the "building of community" where the potential of each human is honored.

Third is the issue of shared leadership. The collaborative environment accords each member recognition, encouraging teachers to take the initiative and become leaders. They believe they have an investment in the success of the school and are empowered to make decisions that they feel more ownership of and are committed to. Through their work they promote the development and growth of fellow staff members.

Within each of these implications are suggestions for further research within this same school context or others. We need to know more about how collaborative cultures are born, what they offer the school environment, including the student, and the role of collaboration in motivating teachers to search for processes that will improve their practice. More understanding about the role of teacher as leader is also necessary.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What kinds of things do you talk about with fellow teachers?

   -planning (teaching practices)

   -activities (i.e. P.D. days, concerts)

   -evaluation (fellow teachers, students)

   -preparation of teaching materials

   -school goals

   -school problems

   -students

   (probe to get detailed information about these issues)

2. How do you feel about these interactions?
3. Is there anything specific that occurs at this school to encourage/ discourage teachers to work together?
5. What type of individual do you prefer to work with?
6. What kinds of things do you talk about with your principal? (repeat similar prompts and repeat question 3.